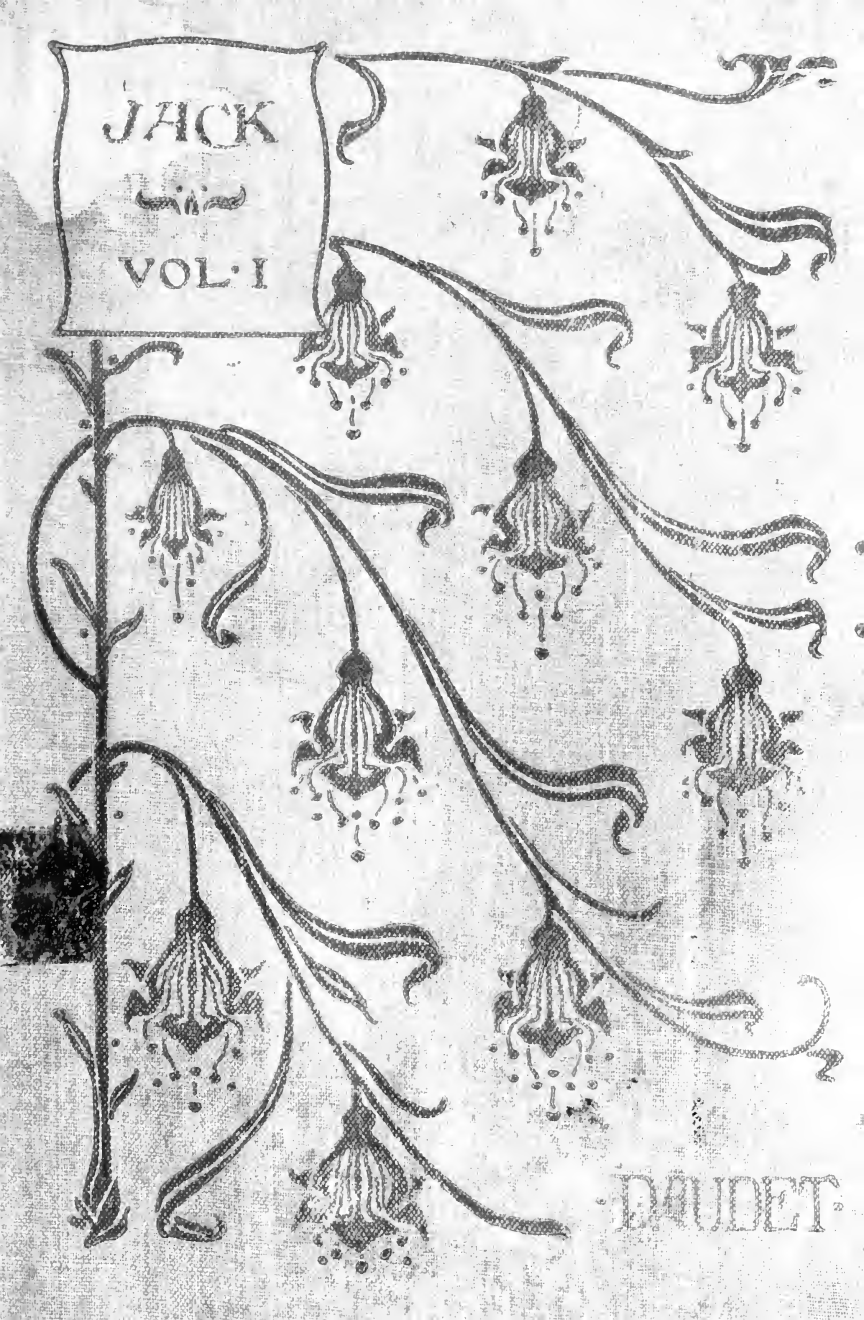


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VOL. I



DAUDET



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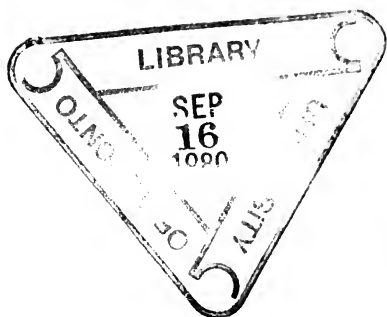
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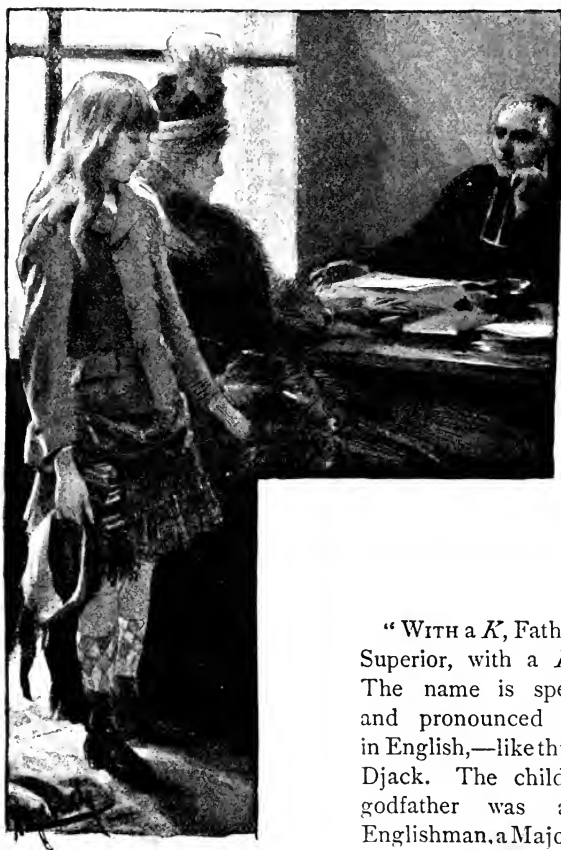
PART THE FIRST.

I.

MOTHER AND CHILD.



"They got out at the Spanish pastrycook's."



“WITH a *K*, Father Superior, with a *K*. The name is spelt and pronounced as in English,—like this, Djack. The child’s godfather was an Englishman, a Major-General in the East India Company’s ser-

vice—Lord Peambock. Perhaps you may have heard of him? A most distinguished man and of the most aristocratic birth; oh, Monsieur l’Abbé, quite the very highest, and such a dancer! He met his death in a dreadful

manner at Singapore, a few years ago, in a magnificent tiger hunt that a rajah, one of his friends, had got up in his honour. It appears they are real kings, those rajahs. That one was remarkably powerful. What was his name? Wait a moment. Dear me, I have his name on the tip of my tongue—Rana—Rama.”

“I beg your pardon, Madame,” interrupted the Principal, smiling in spite of himself at her volubility and rapid transitions from one subject to another, “and after Jack, what shall we put?”

Leaning with his head slightly on one side, over the table where he had been writing a moment before, the worthy priest looked out of the corner of his eyes with a penetrating ecclesiastical scrutiny at the young creature seated in front of him, with her Jack (with a *K*) standing beside her.

She was an elegant woman, tastefully dressed according to the fashion of the day and season—it was in the month of December, 1858; and the softness of her furs, the costliness of her black dress, and the discreet originality of her bonnet, denoted the quiet luxury of a woman who kept a carriage and was accustomed to pass directly from the unsoiled comfort of her carpets to the cushions of her brougham, without having to submit to the contaminating transit of the street.

She had a very small head, which always makes a woman look taller, a pretty face downy like a peach, lively, smiling, and lighted up by a pair of clear and ingenuous eyes, and very white teeth, which she showed on every occasion. The mobility of her features was striking, and something else in this amiable physiognomy scarcely definable—perhaps the weak underlip half opened with a perpetual longing to speak—perhaps the narrow forehead enclosed in the shining bands of hair—showed

an absence of thought, a certain shallowness of mind, and explained the constant parentheses recurring at each instant in this pretty creature's conversation, like those little Japanese baskets which fit one inside another, and of which the last one is always empty.

As for the child, fancy a boy of seven or eight years of age, lanky and overgrown, dressed in English fashion as the *K* in his name of Jack demanded, with bare legs, a plaid, and a Scotch cap ornamented with a silver thistle. The costume, no doubt suitable enough for his age, was out of harmony with his long figure and his already strong neck. The muscular calves protruded with a frozen look from under this grotesque attire, in a clumsy outburst of rebellious growth. He was himself embarrassed by it. Awkward, shy, hanging his head, he every now and then cast a despairing glance at his naked legs, as though cursing at heart Lord Peambock and the Indian army for his whimsical get-up.

Physically he resembled his mother, with something more refined, more distinguished—the transformation of the physiognomy of a pretty woman into that of an intelligent man. He had the same look but more thoughtful, the same forehead but wider, the same mouth, closed however with a more serious expression.

On the woman's face ideas and impressions flitted by without leaving a line or a wrinkle, so rapidly and quickly succeeding one another, that her eyes always seemed to reflect an astonishment at their flight.

With the child one felt, on the contrary, that his thoughts dwelt within him, and his reflective air might have caused anxiety had it not been for a certain laziness of attitude, the languid appearance of the whole little being, the coaxing and timid movements of a boy brought up at his mother's apron strings.

At the present moment, leaning against her, one hand slipped inside her muff, he listened to her with an air of silent admiration, and from time to time he looked at the priest and all his surroundings with repressed and timorous curiosity.

He had promised not to cry.

At times however a suppressed sigh, something like the end of a sob, shook him from head to foot. Then the mother's glance rested on him and seemed to say: "You know what you promised me!" And the child immediately gulped down his sigh and his tears; but his wretchedness was manifest, as well as the cruel impression of forlorn exile that the idea of school life first imparts to children who have been kept long at home.

The cursory investigation of mother and child, which the priest had made in a few seconds, might have satisfied a mere superficial observer, but Father O., who for the last twenty-five years had been at the head of the aristocratic Jesuit establishment at Vaugirard, was too well acquainted with the world, with all the best Parisian society and its various shades of language and style, not to have guessed at once that the mother of the new pupil thus brought to him was a client from an entirely distinct class.

The assurance with which she had entered his study, her self-possession, which was too ostentatious to be real, her very manner of sitting down and throwing herself back in her chair, her rather forced and youthful laugh, and above all the flow of exuberant phrases by which she strove to conceal the embarrassment of some hidden thought—all this aroused the priest's suspicions.

Unfortunately in Paris society is so mixed; the same amusements, costumes, promenades, have led to a line of demarcation so easily broken between fashionable women

of good and bad society—the difference is so slight between a disreputable woman who is prudent, and a marquise who is imprudent, that the most expert observer may at first sight be deceived ; and that was the reason why the priest scanned this woman so attentively.

What chiefly baffled his scrutiny was the incoherence of her conversation. How could he calmly carry out his investigation in the midst of these capricious changes, this conversation darting from one subject to another like a squirrel in a cage? Nevertheless his opinion, which she was perhaps trying to lead astray, was already half determined. The embarrassed attitude of the mother, when he asked what other name the child bore besides that of Jack, settled his doubts.

She blushed, became confused, and hesitated for a moment.

“It’s true,” she said, “pray excuse me. I have not yet introduced myself. What can I have been thinking about?”

And drawing from her pocket a tiny ivory card-case, scented like a sachet, she took out a card on which was engraved in delicate letters the pleasing and insignificant name of:

IDA DE BARANCY.

The Principal gave a peculiar smile.

“It is also the child’s name?” he asked.

His question was almost impertinent. The lady understood it, became still more confused, and hiding her embarrassment under an assumption of great dignity replied:

“Certainly, Monsieur l’Abbé; certainly.”

“Ah!” said the priest, in a grave voice.

It was now his turn to be puzzled and at a loss how to express what he had to say. He rolled the card in his fingers with the slightly quivering lip of a man who knows the weight and effect of the words he is about to utter.

Suddenly he rose, and approaching one of the high glass doors which opened on a level with a large garden full of fine trees, all purple in the red winter sun, he tapped gently on the glass. A dark shadow passed before the window, and almost immediately a young priest made his appearance in the study.

"Here, my good Duffieux," said the Superior, "take this child for a turn. Show him our chapel, our green-houses. He is bored here, poor little man!"

Jack fancied that this pretext of a stroll was to cut short the painful adieux at the moment of separation, and his look betrayed such an intense feeling of despair and terror, that the kind priest gently reassured him.

"Don't be afraid, my little Jack, your mother is not going away; you will find her here when you return."

The child still hesitated.

"Go, my dear!" said Madame de Barancy, with a queen-like gesture.

He at once went out without a word, without a complaint, as though already subdued by life, and ready to accept any servitude.

When he had left, there was silence for a moment in the study. One could hear outside the steps of the child and his companion growing fainter as they went along the frosty gravel walk, the twittering of the sparrows on the branches, the crackling of the fire, the sound of a piano and voices, all the murmurs of a household,—the busy life, deadened by winter and closed windows, of a large school at lessons.

“The child seems very fond of you, Madame,” said the Principal, touched by Jack’s gentle submissiveness.

“How could he not love me?” replied Madame de Barancy in rather too tragic a manner; “the poor darling has only his mother in all the wide world.”

“Ah, you are a widow?”

“Alas, yes, Monsieur le Supérieur. My husband died ten years ago, the very year of our marriage, and in the most painful manner. Ah, Monsieur l’Abbé, the novelists who endow their heroines with such far-fetched adventures, little guess that often the simplest life might furnish matter for ten novels. My existence is a sad proof. The Comte de Barancy belonged, as his name tells you, to one of the most ancient families in Touraine.”

This was an unfortunate hit, for it so happened that Father O. was born at Amboise, and was well acquainted with the noble families of his Province. The Comte de Barancy immediately made one in his mind with his doubts and misgivings on the score of Major-General Peambock and the Rajah of Singapore. Nevertheless he hid his impressions, and merely interrupted gently the pseudo-comtesse.

“Do you not agree with me, Madame,” he asked, “in thinking that it would be cruel to separate yourself so soon from a child who seems so attached to you? He is still very young. Will he have strength to bear the pain of such a parting?”

“You are quite mistaken, sir,” she replied, ingenuously, “Jack is a very strong child. He has never been ill in his life. He is perhaps a trifle pale, but that is due to the air of Paris, to which he is not accustomed.” Annoyed at seeing that she did not understand his hint, the priest resumed, accentuating his intonation this time:

“Moreover, at present our dormitories are full, the

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scholastic year is already far advanced. We have been obliged to put off several new pupils till next year. I should be glad if you would wait till then. Perhaps we might then find room. However, I cannot make any definite promise."

She understood.

"You refuse, therefore, to receive my son?" she said, getting very pale. "Will you also refuse to give me your reasons?"

"Madame," replied the priest, "I would have given much to avoid an explanation, but since you insist upon it, I must inform you that in the establishment confided to my charge, we exact that the families of the children should offer us every guarantee of the strictest morality. There are many lay institutions in Paris where your little Jack will receive all the necessary care, but it is impossible for us to admit him. I entreat you," he added, in answer to a movement of indignation on her part, "do not ask me to explain myself more clearly. I have not the right to ask or reproach you with anything. I regret exceedingly the pain I am now causing you, and believe me when I assure you that my refusal is as painful to myself as it is to you."

While the priest was speaking, Madame de Barancy's face had betrayed her mingled feelings of pain, disdain, and confusion. At first she had striven to put a bold face on the matter, holding her head high, and keeping up her mask of worldliness, but the kindly words of the Principal falling on her childish heart made her suddenly break down and give way to sobs, tears, and confessions, in loud and distressed expansiveness.

Oh yes, she was very wretched. No one knew all she had already endured for that child.

Well, yes, it was true! The poor little fellow had no



name, no father ; but was it right that his misfortune should be imputed to him as a crime, and ought he to be made responsible for the fault of his parents? "Ah, Monsieur l'Abbé, I implore you !"

And while she spoke, with a despairing gesture which at a less serious moment would have caused a smile, she seized hold of the priest's hand, the handsome, soft, white hand of a prelate, which the kind Father tried gently to withdraw, not without a certain feeling of embarrassment.

"Calm yourself, my dear lady," he said, alarmed at her effusive tears, for she cried like a child that she was, with sobs and suffocations and the ingenuous despair of a low-born woman.

The poor priest thought, "What on earth can I do, if the lady faints ?"

But it seemed as though all he said only excited her the more.

She would justify herself, explain things, give an account of her life ; and *nolens volens*, the Father Superior was obliged to listen to the unintelligible tale, broken, disjointed and interminable, into which she launched forth, breaking the connecting link at each moment, heedless of how she should start afresh.

"The name of Barancy was not her own. Oh! if she could tell her own name, he would be very much astonished. But the honour of one of the oldest families of France—you understand—one of the very oldest, was involved, and she would die sooner than reveal it."

In vain did the Principal protest, in vain did he assure her that he had no designs whatever on her secret, he could not succeed in even getting a hearing. She was started off, and it would have been easier to stop the sails of a windmill in full swing than to arrest the whirlwind of empty words. The point she seemed most anxious to

prove was that she belonged to the highest aristocracy, that her faithless seducer also quartered something on I know not what escutcheon, and that moreover she had been the victim of the most unheard-of fatality.

What was true in all this? Not a word probably, for reticences and contradictions abounded in this incoherent narrative. However, there was something sincere and even touching in the love of the mother for her child. They had always lived together. She had given him masters at home, and it was only now that his intelligence was awakening and his eyes opening to things she wished to keep from his knowledge, that she had decided to let him go from her.

"The best means," said the priest gravely, "would be to do away with all that is irregular in your life, and make your house worthy of the child it shelters."

"That is my constant preoccupation, Monsieur l'Abbé," she replied. "As Jack grows up I feel I am becoming more serious. Moreover, the likelihood that my position will be made regular becomes every day greater. For some time past a friend of mine has been soliciting my hand, but in the mean time I should like my child to be away, to be removed from my still agitated existence. I should wish him to have an aristocratic and Christian education, which should make him worthy of the great name he ought to bear. I thought that nowhere would he receive it as well as in your house; but you thrust him away and at the same time discourage his mother's good resolutions."

The Principal seemed shaken. He hesitated for a moment and then, looking her full in the face, said "Well, so let it be, Madame; since you ardently desire it, I accede to your wishes. Your little Jack pleases me greatly. I consent to admit him among our scholars."

“ Ah ! Monsieur l'Abbé ! ”

“ But on two conditions.”

“ I am ready to accept any.”

“ The first one is, that until your position has become regular, the child shall spend his holidays, his vacations even, at our house, and shall not put his foot inside yours.”

“ But my poor Jack will die if he no longer sees his mother.”

“ Oh, you will be able to come and embrace him as often as you like. Only—and this is the second condition—you will never see him in the reception room, but here in my study, where I shall take care that you are not seen.”

She rose up in a tremor.

The idea that she would never enter the reception room, never mingle in all the delightful confusion of the Thursdays' visits, never enjoy the satisfaction of vanity in her child's beauty, in the elegance of her own attire and of the brougham waiting at the door; that she would never be able to say to her friends, “ Yesterday at the Jesuit Fathers I bowed to Madame de C—— or Madame de V——,” real great ladies; that she would have to come on the sly to kiss her Jack in private—all this in short disgusted her.

The shrewd priest had rightly judged her.

“ You are cruel, Monsieur l'Abbé, you force me to refuse what a moment ago I thanked you for as a favour, but I have to consider my dignity as a mother and a woman. Your conditions are impossible. What would my child think ? ”

Catching sight outside the window of the fair little face, brightened by the keen outdoor air and his own feverish anxiety, she suddenly stopped short. On a sign from his mother, the child quickly entered.

“ Oh, Mamma, how nice of you ! In spite of their saying it was not so, I thought you had gone.”

She took his hand abruptly.

“ You will come away with me,” she said ; “ they won’t have us here.”

And she stepped out of the room, upright, haughty, dragging the child, who was bewildered at this unexpected departure, which resembled a flight. She barely vouchsafed a nod in return to the respectful bow of the good Father, who had also risen from his chair ; but notwithstanding her precipitation, she did not hurry away quickly enough to prevent Jack hearing a gentle voice murmur behind him : “ Poor child ! poor child ! ” with an accent, a compassion, that went to his heart.

He was to be pitied. Wherefore ?

How often this exclamation came back to his mind !

The Principal was not mistaken.

Madame la Comtesse de Barancy was a sham countess. Her name was not de Barancy, perhaps not even Ida. Where did she spring from ? Who was she ? What truth was there in those stories about the aristocracy she was so full of ? No one could tell. These complicated lives have so many different phases, so much beneath the surface, a past so long, and so full of incidents, that one can never know but their last stage. They can only be compared to those revolving beacons that have long intervals of darkness between the intermittent flashes of their light.

What was certain was, that she was not a Parisian ; she came from a provincial town of which she still retained the accent, she knew nothing about Paris and was absolutely wanting in style, according to the opinion expressed by Mademoiselle Constant, her maid.

“ A provincial *cocotte* ! ” said she disdainfully.

As a reliable piece of information, this was rather vague.

It is true, that one evening at the *Gymnase Theatre*, two business men from Lyons had fancied they recognized in her a certain *Mélanie Favrot*, who formerly kept a glove and perfumery shop on the *Place des Terreaux*; but these gentlemen would appear to have been mistaken, and made many apologies. Another time an officer in the 3rd Hussars imagined that she was a certain *Nana* with whom he had been acquainted some eight years previously at *Orléansville*. He also made the same apologies, having made the same mistake. Likenesses are really very impertinent sometimes.

However, *Madame de Barancy* had travelled a great deal, and did not conceal the fact; but he would indeed be a wizard who could have made out anything distinct and positive in the flow of words that she poured forth on every opportunity about her origin and life. One day *Ida* would have been born in the colonies and talk of her mother, a charming *Creole*—of her plantations, her negresses; another time she came from the province of *Touraine*, and had spent her childhood in a large *château* on the borders of the *Loire*. And withal, there were details, and anecdotes, and a surprising indifference for the inaccuracy and incoherency exhibited in the recital of her life.

As we have seen, vanity predominated throughout all these fantastic accounts—the vanity of a chattering parakeet. Aristocracy, fortune, money, titles, these were her constant theme.

Rich she certainly was, or at least she had plenty of money placed at her disposal. A little hotel on the *Boulevard Haussmann* had been lately rented for her. There she had horses, carriages, handsome furniture of doubtful taste and three or four servants; she led the empty, idle,

aimless existence of women of her kind, but had retained a slightly shamefaced air and a want of assurance, impressed upon her no doubt by her life in the provinces, where the success of certain women is more difficult than in Paris. This, and a real freshness, remnant of a childhood spent in the open air, placed her apart in Parisian life, where however she had not yet taken rank, having only just arrived. Once a week, a middle-aged man, slightly grey and of distinguished appearance, came to see her. Speaking of him, Ida said "*Monsieur*" in such a pompous manner, that one might have thought oneself at the French Court, when the King's brother was thus called. The child simply said "*Bon ami*," and the servants announced loudly as "*Monsieur le Comte*," him whom amongst themselves they familiarly named "*her old man*."

Her old man must have been very rich, for Madame objected to no extravagance, and there was an enormous amount of waste in the establishment which was superintended by Mademoiselle Constant, the factotum lady's-maid, sole and real influence in the house. It was Constant who furnished her mistress with the tradespeople's addresses, who guided her inexperienced steps in Parisian life and good society, for above all, the dream, the longing of this outcast—a longing that no doubt had sprung up with her fortune—was to pass for a perfect lady, distinguished, aristocratic, and irreproachable.

It may therefore easily be imagined what a state Father O.'s reception had put her in, and in how furious a rage she left him.

An elegant brougham awaited her at the door of the establishment. She dashed rather than stepped into it with her child, just keeping up sufficient strength to say in a firm clear voice: "Home!" so as to be heard by a

group of priests who were chatting on the door-steps, and who quickly gave way to make room for this whirlwind of furs and curly hair.

When however the carriage had started, the wretched woman threw herself back in a corner, not in her usual coquettish attitude, but crushed and in tears, stifling her sobs and cries in the padded silk lining.

What a disgrace ! What ! they had refused to admit her child, and at the first glance that priest had discovered her position—she who had thought it so well disguised under the luxurious and deceiving appearance of a woman of the world and of an irreproachable mother.

What she was could then be seen !

Every now and again the shrewd glance of the Principal which her wounded pride summoned before her as an intolerable torture brought to her face red and burning blushes of shame. She remembered her loquacity, all the lies so uselessly uttered, and the smile, the incredulous smile that yet had not checked her, though so completely finding her out from the very first.

From the other corner of the carriage, motionless and silent, Jack looked sadly at his mother, puzzled at her despair, though he knew it was on his account. Poor little fellow ! he felt vaguely that he was guilty, but at the bottom of his sadness lay the immense joy of not having been left at school.

Just fancy ! For the last fortnight they had talked of nothing but that Vaugirard. His mother had made him promise to be very good and not to cry. "*Bon ami*" had exhorted him, Constant had bought his outfit. Everything was ready, decided. He however lived in fear and trembling at the idea of this prison into which everyone was pushing him. And now, at the last moment, he was reprieved !

Oh ! if his mother had not been so unhappy, how he would have thanked her, how happy he would have been to feel so near her, ensconced in the furs of the little brougham, in which they had taken such delightful drives, and in which they would take ever so many more. And Jack remembered the afternoons in the Bois de Boulogne, the long delicious drives through the chilly and muddy streets of Paris, so new to both of them, and about which they were as curious one as the other. A monument, the smallest incident, everything amused them.

“Look, Jack.”

“Look, Mamma.”

They were like two children. And one might see, looking out of the same carriage window, the long fair curls of the little lad and the closely veiled face of the mother.

A despairing cry from Madame de Barancy abruptly recalled the child from all these charming memories. “Ah ! Good Heavens ! what have I done,” she said, wringing her hands, “what have I done to be so miserable?”

This exclamation naturally remained without an answer ; for as to what she had done, little Jack was at least as ignorant as she was. Then, scarcely knowing what to say, how to console her, he timidly took her hand and pressed it fervently against his lips, like a real lover.

She started violently, and looking at him in a wild manner :

“Ah ! cruel, cruel child, how you have pained me ever since you came into the world !”

Jack turned pale.

“I ? I have pained you ?”

He knew and loved but one being on earth, his mother.



He thought her beautiful, good, perfect. And without intending, without knowing it, he had pained her!

At this idea, the poor little fellow had in his turn a fit of despair, but a silent despair, as though after the exhibition of noisy grief he had witnessed, he felt ashamed of displaying his sorrow. He shook with silent sobs, in almost a nervous spasm.

The mother, frightened, took him in her arms:

"No, no, it was a joke. Oh! what a baby! Is he as sensitive as all that? Just look at this big baby with his long legs, being petted like an infant. No, my little Jack, you have never pained me. It is I who am mad to mix you up in such stories. Come, don't cry any more. Look, am I crying?"

And the strange creature, forgetful of her past grief, frankly laughed to make her Jack smile. It was one of the privileges of that fickle nature, all on the surface, not to keep any impression whatever for long. Curiously enough, the tears she had just shed had given her face a more brilliant and youthful look, as a shower passing over a dove's plumage makes it gleam and glisten without penetrating it.

"Where can we be?" she suddenly said, lowering the glass dimmed with steam. "Already the Madeleine! How quickly we have come! Suppose we stop at what's-his-name—you know, the famous pastry-cook. Come, dry your eyes, little goosey. I'll treat you to some meringues."

They got out at the Spanish pastry-cook's, at that time very fashionable.

It was crowded.

Silks and furs rustled, as the ladies pressed forward in the hurry of their appetites, and their faces, with veils raised only to their eyes, were reflected in the mirrors framed in gilded and cream-coloured mouldings, amidst

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the joyous medley of milky-white saucers, sparkling glasses, and tempting cakes.

Madame de Barancy and her child attracted some notice. She was delighted. This little success, added to the past emotion, made her devour a quantity of meringues and nougats, washed down by a drop of Spanish wine. Jack followed her example, but with more moderation, for his recent big grief had left his heart full of suppressed sighs and unshed tears.

When they left the shop, the day although cold was so bright, the Madeleine flower-market exhaled such a sweet perfume of violets, that Ida decided to send away her carriage and return home on foot.

Briskly, but with the rather slow steps of a woman who was accustomed to allow herself to be admired, she started, holding Jack by the hand. The walk in the fresh crisp air, and the sight of the shops which were just being lighted up, completely restored her good temper.

Then, suddenly, in front of a shop window more sparkling than the others, she recollected a masked ball she was going to that evening, a ball which was to be preceded by a dinner at a restaurant.

"Good gracious! I was quite forgetting it. Just see, my little Jack, how giddy I am—quick, quick!"

She required flowers, a bouquet, besides a few other forgotten trifles. The child, whose life was made up of these nothings, and who felt the subtle charm of this elegant refinement almost as much as herself, skipped along by her side, excited at the thought of the festivities which he would not see. His mother's dress, her beauty, and the admiration she created, formed perhaps his greatest pleasures.

"Charming—charming—you will send that to my house, Boulevard Haussmann."

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And Madame de Barancy, throwing down her card, went out, talking to Jack with exuberant delight of her purchases.

Then she assumed a serious air :

“Mind,” she said, “remember my warning. You must never tell ‘*Bon Ami*’ that I went to this ball. It’s a secret. Dear me ! already five o’clock ! How Constant will scold me !”

She was not mistaken.

Her factotum lady’s-maid, a tall large woman of some forty years of age, ugly and masculine, hurried to her directly she heard her enter the house.

“The costume was there. It was most unreasonable to come in so late. Madame would never be ready. She could never be dressed in so short a time.”

“Don’t scold me, my good Constant. If you knew what has happened—there, look !”

And she pointed to the child. The factotum appeared indignant.

“What ! Master Jack, you have come back ? It is very wrong of you, sir, after all you had promised. You will have to be taken to school by the policeman. Really ! your mamma is too good.”

“No, no, it is not his fault. It is those priests who would not have him. Can you understand that ? To put such an insult upon me !”

Thereupon her tears flowed afresh, and she began again to inquire of the Almighty what she had done to be so miserable. With this and the meringues and the Spanish wine, and the heat of the apartment, she fainted.

She had to be laid on her bed, and salts and ether bottles had to be uncorked to revive her. Mademoiselle Constant acquitted herself of all these duties after the fashion of one well accustomed to such scenes, coming

and going in the room, opening and shutting the cupboards, with the cool presence of mind begotten by long experience, and the calm and confident assurance that "it is nothing, and it will soon pass over."

As she attended to her duties she muttered to herself, "What an idea after all, to take the child to the Jesuit Fathers! As if that was a school for him, in his position! If I had been consulted this would not have happened. It is not I who would be embarrassed to find a school for him, and a good one, too!"

Jack, frightened to death at seeing his mother in such a state, had drawn nearer to the bed, and was looking at her anxiously; begging her pardon in his inmost heart for having unwittingly caused her this trouble.

"Come, get away from there, Master Jack. Your mamma is all right again. I must dress her."

"What! Constant, you can wish me to go to this ball? Do you think I am in a mood to amuse myself?"

"Pooh! it doesn't signify. I know you—in a few minutes you will have forgotten it all. Just look at the pretty fancy dress, the pink silk stockings, and your little cap and bells."

She had taken up the dress, and spread it out, making the bells tinkle and all its tinsel glitter before the eyes of Ida, who could no longer resist the temptation. While his mother was dressing, Jack went off all alone into the dark boudoir.

The coquettish little room, with its soft hangings and numberless knick-knacks, was filled with gloom, only broken by the vague glimmer of the nearest street lamp. Sadly leaning his forehead against the window-pane, he thought over all the day's emotion; and little by little, hardly knowing how, he felt himself to be the "poor child" the priest had spoken of with so much commiseration.

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It is strange to be pitied when one fancies oneself happy. Are there then misfortunes so well hidden that those who are the cause or the victims of them do not even guess them?

The door opened. His mother was ready.

“Come in, Master Jack, and see how beautiful she is!”

Oh, what a charming Folly, all in satin, pink and silver! What a pretty rustling the spangles made at every movement!

The child gazed admiringly, and the mother, powdered, airy and graceful, rattle in hand, smiled to Jack, smiled to herself in the looking-glass, without troubling herself any more about what she had done to the Almighty to be made so unhappy. Then Constant threw a warm opera cloak over her shoulders and accompanied her to the carriage, while Jack, leaning over the banisters, watched the two little pink shoes embroidered with silver, trip over the stair carpet as lightly and quickly as though already beginning to dance, carrying his mother off, far, far away from him, to balls where children went not. At the last jingle of the bells, he turned back listlessly; and for the first time in his life he felt worried at the desertion which was nevertheless of nightly occurrence. When Madame de Barancy dined out, Jack was left in charge of Mademoiselle Constant.

“She will dine with you,” his mother would say.

Two covers were laid in the dining room, which the child thought very dreary on those occasions; but generally, Constant, who was not much amused by a tête-à-tête with the boy, took their plates down to the kitchen, and they dined in the basement in company with the other servants.

It was a regular feast.

Disorderly extravagance was to be seen in the over-

loaded table covered with grease spots, and in the wild spirits of the guests. As a matter of course the factotum presided, and she made no scruple in amusing the company with her mistress's adventures, turning her phrases, however, in such a way as not to startle the little fellow.

That evening there was a great discussion below-stairs about the refusal incurred at Vaugirard. Augustin, the coachman, declared it was so much the better—that those people would have made the child “a Jesuit, a hypocrite.”

Mademoiselle Constant objected to the expression. She did not pretend to be religious, 'twas true, but she would not allow religion to be spoken against. Then the discussion turned off to something else, to the intense disappointment of Jack, who had been listening with all his ears, in hopes of finding out why that priest, who appeared so kind, would not have anything to do with him.

For a while, the conversation ran no longer upon Jack or his mother, but upon the religious opinions of each one of the company. The coachman Augustin, after a certain amount of drink, held rather peculiar ones. His God was the sun ; he knew of no other.

“I'm like the elephants, I adore the sun !” he kept on repeating with drunken obstinacy.

At last they asked him where he had seen that the elephants adored the sun.

“I saw it once in a photograph !” he declared, with a solemn idiotic air.

On which Mademoiselle Constant called him an impious atheist, while the cook, a fat Picardy woman, full of peasant's cunning, kept saying to them both :

“Listen, you're wrong—one must not discuss belief.”

And Jack ? What was he doing all that time ?

Seated at the end of the table, drowsy in the heavy

atmosphere of the stoves, and the interminable discussions of these coarse natures, he was dropping asleep as he leant his face on his arm, his fair curls spread out over his velvet sleeves. In the disagreeable and tiring discomfort that precedes slumber taken sitting, he heard the whispering of the three servants' voices. Now he fancied they were talking of him, but it seemed far, far away in a mist.

"Whose child is he, poor darling?" inquired the cook's voice.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Constant, "but what's certain is that he can't remain here, and she has told me to find a school for him."

Between two hiccups, the coachman stammered out :

"Wait a bit, wait a bit. I know a famous one, that I do, a school that will per—perfectly suit you. It's called the College, no, not the College, the Gy—the Gymnase Moronval. But all the same it's a school. When I was with the Saïds, my Egyptians, it's there I used to take the son ; the birch-master, a kind of half black, always gave me prospectuses. I must have one still."

He hunted through his pocket-book, and among the crumpled papers it contained chose one, even dirtier than the others.

"Here it is !" he exclaimed triumphantly.

He unfolded the prospectus and began to read or rather spell it out laboriously :

"Gy—Gymnase—Moronval—in—the—"

"Give it to me," said Mademoiselle Constant, and taking the paper from him, she read out :

"*Gymnase Moronval, 25, Avenue Montaigne.—In the finest quarter of Paris.—Private education.—Large garden.—Limited number of pupils.—Lessons in pronunciation according to the Moronval-Decostère method. Foreign and Provincial accents rectified.—Defects of*

pronunciation through imperfect position of the phonetic organs, corrected."

Mademoiselle Constant stopped to take breath, and said to the others :

"Why, that sounds very suitable."

"I should think so indeed," said the Picarde, with round staring eyes.

" . . . of the phonetic organs, corrected.—Lessons in reading aloud with expression, principles of articulation and respiration."

The reading of the prospectus went on ; but Jack had fallen asleep and heard no more.

He was dreaming.

Yes, while his future was being discussed around this loathsome kitchen table ; while his mother, in her pink fancy dress, was madly enjoying herself no one knows where, he dreamed of the priest he had seen at the Fathers yonder, and the soft penetrating voice that had said :

"Poor child !"

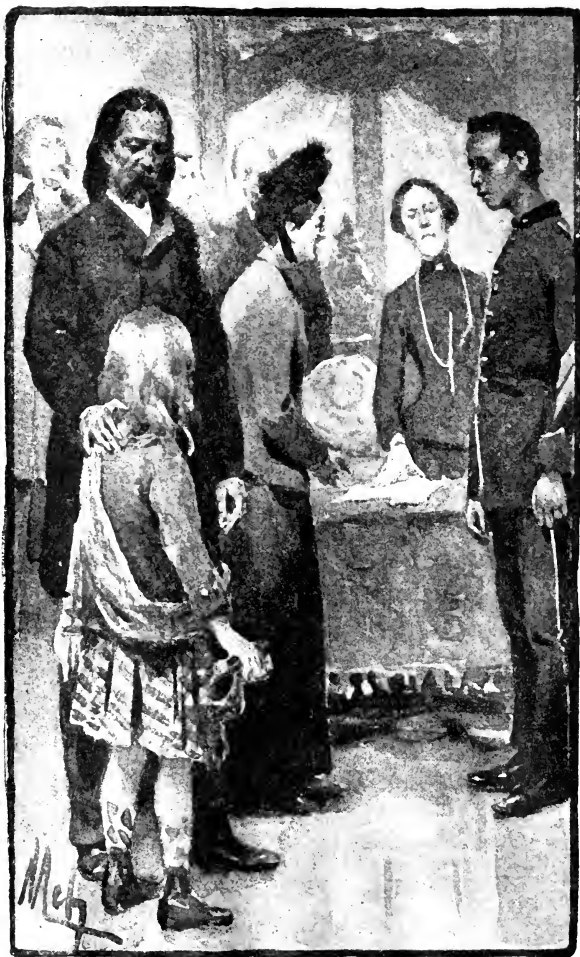


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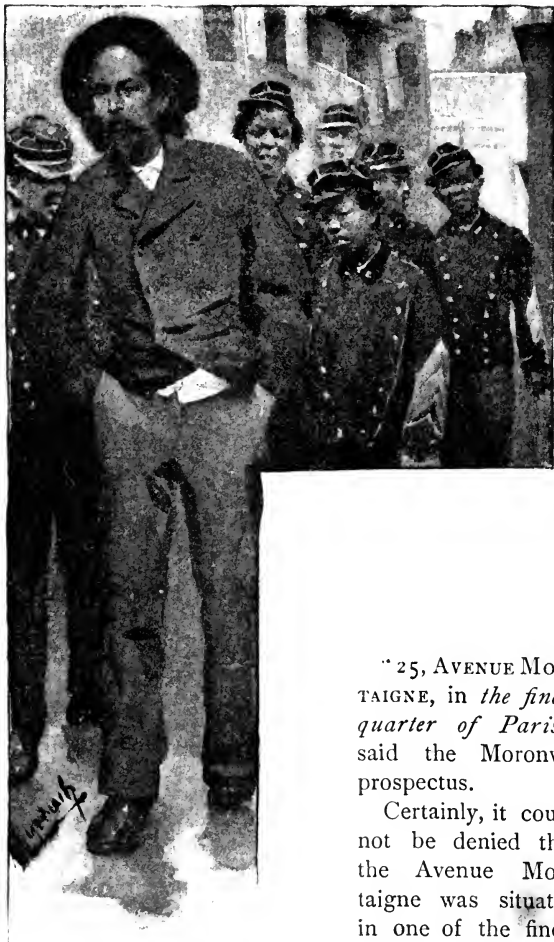
THE GYMNASSE MORONVAL.

I.

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A big swarthy collegian entered.



"25, AVENUE MONTAIGNE, in *the finest quarter of Paris*," said the Moronval prospectus.

Certainly, it could not be denied that the Avenue Montaigne was situated in one of the finest quarters of Paris, in

the middle of the Champs Elysées, and that it afforded very agreeable quarters, bounded as it was at one end by the Seine, and at the other by the plashing

fountains in the midst of the flower-beds of the Rond-Point. But it has the incongruous composite appearance of a street too rapidly planned and as yet unfinished.

By the side of handsome mansions, with their rounded angles embellished by plate-glass windows, bright-lined silk curtains, gilt statuettes, and rustic flower-stands, stood artisans' lodgings, mere sheds, resounding with the blows of blacksmiths' and wheelwrights' hammers. These were the remains of the old suburb, and were enlivened at night by the sound of the fiddles in the Jardin Mabille, and all the noise of a much frequented dancing garden. There might even be seen at that time, and I suppose they still exist, two or three sordid passages, ancient remnants of the former Allée des Veuves, their filthy aspect forming a curious contrast with the surrounding magnificence.

One of these lanes began at the No. 25 of the Avenue Montaigne, and was called the *Passage des Douze Maisons*.

Gilded letters over the pointed arch of the iron gateway pompously set forth that the Institution Moronval was to be found here. But as soon as the gate was entered, one came upon the black, noisome, inevitable mud that recent pulling down and building up accumulates—the mud of waste lands. The street lamp swinging across the passage, the gutter running down the middle, and on each side the low lodging-houses, the buildings finished off with old planks, all carried one some forty years back to the furthest end of Paris, in the direction of La Chapelle or Ménilmontant.

From these kinds of Swiss cottages, with their covered galleries, balconies, and exterior stairways bringing them into immediate contact with the street, overflowed hanging linen, rabbit-hutches, and a confusion of ragged children, lean cats and tame magpies.

It seemed astonishing that in so small a space there should be such a swarming population of English grooms and unemployed servants; so many old liveries in tatters, red waistcoats and check plaid caps. Add to all these, every evening at sunset—when their day's work was ended—the women who hire out chairs or goat carriages, the Punch and Judy showmen, the sellers of waffles, or rare dogs, beggars of all sorts, the little dwarfs from the Hippodrome with their microscopic ponies and their sandwich advertisements, all of whom had their home here, and some faint idea may be conceived of this singular passage, placed like a dark crowded side-wing behind the beautiful scenery of the Champs Elysées; surrounded by the green trees, the dull rolling of the carriages, and the calm luxury of the big avenues of which it seemed the turbulent and miserable lining.

In the midst of this picturesque assemblage, the Gymnase Moronval was not out of place.

Several times a day, a tall lean mulatto with long lanky hair falling on his shoulders and a wide-brimmed, Quaker-looking hat placed like a halo on the back of his head, would cross the alley with an important air, followed by half a dozen* little imps whose complexions varied from a light copper colour to the darkest ebony-black, and whose worn-out school uniforms, wan faces, and overgrown bodies made them look like some rebellious corps of a colonial army.

The director of the Gymnase Moronval thus exercised his little *pays chauds*,* as he called them, and the comings and goings of this multi-coloured school, the desultoriness of its occupations, the peculiar appearance

* "Tropics."

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of the professors were quite in keeping with the strange physiognomy of the *Passage des Douze Maisons*.

No doubt if Madame de Barancy had herself taken her child to the Gymnase, the sight of this "Cour des Miracles" which had to be crossed before reaching the establishment would have horrified her, and she would never have consented to leave "her dear little fellow" in such a sink of iniquity. But her visit to the Jesuits had been so unfortunate, her reception so different from what she had expected, that the poor creature, timid at heart and easily disconcerted, had feared some new mortification, and left to Mademoiselle Constant, her maid, the care of placing Jack in the school chosen for him by her servants.

It was on a raw snowy morning that Ida's carriage stopped in the Avenue Montaigne before the gilt placard of the Gymnase Moronval.

The alley was deserted, the street lamp creaked as it swung to and fro, and the boards of the hovels, the paper window panes, all had the mouldy, disjoined, tumble-down appearance that might be produced by some recent inundation or the neighbourhood of a half constructed canal.

The undaunted factotum marched on bravely, her umbrella in one hand and holding the child by the other.

At the twelfth house they stopped.

It was quite at the further end of the alley, where it narrowed still more between two high walls before turning into the Rue Marbœuf. A few black straggling branches shivered above a faded green door.

A certain neatness reigned in the immediate vicinity of the aristocratic establishment: the oyster shells, broken crockery, old empty sardine boxes were carefully swept

away from the green gate, which seemed, by its massive and defiant air, to defend the entrance of a prison or a convent.

Mademoiselle Constant's vigorous ring at the bell, suddenly broke the deep silence which made the garden and buildings of the Gymnase seem vaster than they were.

It made Jack's heart grow cold ; and in the garden the sparrows, grouped together on one tree with the instinct of association made by winter and the scarcity of grain, flew away, startled by the sound, on to the edge of the neighbouring roof.

No one, however, came to open ; but behind the heavy doors a whispering could be heard, and at the little open grating appeared a black face with thick lips, big round eyes and silent grin.

"The Gymnase Moronval?" inquired Madame de Barancy's imposing-looking factotum.

The woolly head disappeared, making room for another of a different type, Manchoo or Tartar, with little slits of eyes, high cheekbones and narrow pointed skull. Then again a coffee-coloured half-breed appeared with inquiring smile ; but the door remained shut and Mademoiselle Constant was getting impatient when a shrill voice called out from afar : "Will you open, you set of monkeys?"

The whisperings immediately increased, becoming more accentuated and more peculiar. The keys were hurriedly turned in the rusty locks with an accompaniment of oaths, blows and terrific scuffling, and when at last the door opened, Jack could see the backs of the boys as they ran away on all sides, just as scared as the sparrows on the tree.

There only remained at the entrance, a tall, lanky

mulatto whose white tie, wound round and round his skinny neck, made his face appear still more black and ashen.

M. Moronval begged Mademoiselle Constant to be good enough to enter; offered her his arm, and led her across a tolerably large garden, in which, however, the broken-up paths and devastated flower-beds were rendered more desolate by the grey uniformity of the winter colouring.

Several detached houses, scattered and of curious shapes, were dotted about what had once been grass plots, The Gymnase had formerly, it appears, belonged to an equestrian photographer, and had been turned by Mr. Moronval into a scholastic establishment. There was also a great glass-covered, sanded rotunda, which was used by the pupils as a play-room, and of which the glass panes, placed like those of a greenhouse, were for the most part broken or cracked, and mended by numberless strips of paper.

In one of the paths they met a little nigger in a red waistcoat, armed with a large broom and a coal-scuttle. He timidly and respectfully drew back before Mr. Moronval, who said rapidly as he passed:

“Fire in the drawing-room.”

The negro looked as bewildered and astounded as though he had just been told that the drawing-room was on fire, instead of simply being ordered to light one quickly.

It was not indeed a superfluous order.

Nothing could be colder than that large parlour, of which the faded red-brick floor, waxed and shiny, gave one the impression of a frozen and slippery lake. The furniture even tried to defend itself from the polar atmosphere huddled up in ill-fitting old covers, in which it



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wrapped itself as well as it could, like hospital patients in their uniform dressing gowns.

However, Mademoiselle Constant saw neither the dilapidated walls nor the bareness of the large drawing-room which resembled a partly glazed passage, the equestrian photographer having left as a mark of his stay in these incongruous buildings an abundance of cold light that might easily have been dispensed with.

The lady's maid was entirely taken up with the pleasure of playing the lady and giving herself an air of importance. She beamed, saying the children must be very well there, in good air quite like the country.


"Quite like the country," repeated affectedly Moronval. There was a moment's disturbance and settling down, such as occurs in a poverty-stricken house, where visitors always seem to scare away a mass of invisible atoms.

The little nigger was laying the fire. Mr. Moronval sought a stool for the distinguished stranger. At last Madame Moronval *née* Decostère, who had been sent for, made her entry with a pretentious bow. This tiny, tiny woman with her long pallid face, all chin and forehead, must have been vaguely deformed. She invariably presented herself full face, bolt upright, not to lose an inch of her little figure, as though striving to hide a something existing,—I hardly know what,—that she was aware of between her shoulders. And withal she was very amiable, bustling and pompous.

She called the child to her, stroked his long hair, thought his eyes very handsome.

"His mother's eyes," impudently added Moronval, looking at Mademoiselle Constant.

The latter seemed in no hurry to correct his mistake, but Jack indignantly cried out with tears in his voice: "She's not my mamma—she's my servant."



Whereupon Madame Moronval *née* Decostère, rather ashamed at her familiarity, assumed a reserved manner that might have damaged the interests of the establishment. Fortunately her husband redoubled in amiability, understanding at once that a servant entrusted with bringing her master's child to a school, must play rather an important part in the household.

Mademoiselle Constant soon proved it. She spoke in a loud and peremptory tone, did not conceal that the choice of a school had been entirely left to her discretion; and each time she pronounced her mistress's name, it was with a little air of protection and commiseration, that threw Jack into a state of despair.

They discussed the price of the school—three thousand francs (a hundred and twenty pounds) a year, besides the outfit. Then, as soon as the sum had been stated, Moronval began his clap-trap.

Three thousand francs! It might appear a large sum. Yes, certainly, he was the first to admit that. But the *Gymnase* Moronval was not like other institutions. It was not without good reason that it had been given the German style of name—*Gymnase*, a place for the free exercise of both mind and body. Here, at the same time as the pupils were instructed, they were also initiated in Parisian life.

They accompanied their master to the theatre and in society. At the more important academic meetings they were witnesses of the literary displays. Instead of making them pedantic brutes, crammed with Greek and Latin, he strove to develop their human feelings, to teach them the pleasures of family life, which so many of them, being foreigners, had long been deprived of. Nevertheless, learning was not neglected—on the contrary; the most eminent and learned men and artists did not think it

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beneath them to associate themselves with this philanthropic work as professors ; professors of science, history, music, literature, whose lessons alternating every day with a course of lectures on the French pronunciation according to the new and infallible method, of which Madame Moronval-Decostère was the author. Moreover, once a week there was a public exhibition of expressive reading aloud, when the parents of the pupils or their representatives were invited, and at which they could assure themselves of the excellency of the Moronval system.

This long tirade from the director, who more than any one would have required the lessons in pronunciation from his wife, was rapidly delivered, for, like a creole, he swallowed half his words and suppressed the r's in his discourse ; saying, "pofesso of liteatue" for "professor of literature," and, "philanthropic work" for "philanthropic work."

It was of no consequence, Mademoiselle Constant was dazzled.

The monetary question did not exist for her, she need hardly say. What was really important, was that the child should receive a refined and aristocratic education.

"Oh ! as for that," said Madame Moronval *née* Decostère throwing up her long face.

And her husband added, that he only admitted to the Gymnase foreigners of distinction, the heirs of great families, nobles and princes. He was even at this very moment educating a child of royal blood, the son of the King of Dahomey. This time, Mademoiselle Constant's enthusiasm knew no bounds.

"A king's son ! You hear, Master Jack, you will be brought up with a king's son !"

"Yes," solemnly continued the schoolmaster, "I have been entrusted by his Dahomian Majesty with the educa-

tion of his Royal Highness, and I think, without boasting, that I have succeeded in making a remarkable man of him from every point of view."

What could be the matter with the little nigger over there, that he suddenly became so agitated and shook the coal-scuttle, making such a metallic clatter?

The schoolmaster continued :

"I hope, and Madame de Moronval-Decostère here present shares my hope, that the young king, when he has ascended to the throne of his ancestors, will remember the good advice, the good examples his Parisian masters have given him, the happy time spent amongst them, their indefatigable care and their unflagging efforts."

Here Jack was very much surprised to see the nigger, who was still busy with the fire, turn his woolly head towards him, and shake it, rolling his big white eyes in an energetic pantomime of furious denial.

Did he mean by that, that his Royal Highness would not remember the excellent lessons received at the Gymnase Moronval, or that he would feel no gratitude for them?

What could he, the slave, know about it?

After this last phrase of the professor, Mademoiselle Constant declared she was ready to pay, as is usual, a quarter in advance.

Moronval made a sublime gesture as though to say :

"There is no hurry."

There was, on the contrary, a great hurry!

The whole house called out for help, through its broken-down furniture, its crumbling walls, its thread-bare carpets, and Moronval's shabby black coat also told its tale of dire necessity, as well as the shiny, flabby dress of the long-chinned little woman.

What, however, proved it still more, was the eagerness of both husband and wife in fetching from the next room

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a handsome locked register, in which to inscribe the name and age of the new boy, and the date of his entrance into the Gymnase.

While these important questions were being settled, the negro remained squatted in front of the fire, where, however, his presence seemed very unnecessary.

The chimney, which had at first refused to consume the smallest bit of wood, like digestive organs that by dint of abstinence are closed and refuse all nourishment, now devoured greedily, fanning with all the strength of its draught a fine red flame, capricious and noisy.

The little negro, his head between his fists and his eyes transfixed as though in a state of ecstasy, looked, with his black outline on the flaming background, like some impish form.

He opened his mouth in silent laughter, with his eyes wide open.

One would have said that he was breathing in all over the heat and light, shiveringly enveloped in the radiancy of the hearth, while outside, under the low and yellow sky, the white snow fluttered in the air.

Jack was sad.

This Moronval had a cruel look, notwithstanding all his honest words.

And then, in this queer school, the child felt lost, felt still further from his mother, as though all these coloured boys, come from every part of the world, had brought with them a sensation of utter forlornness, and a sadness of exile.

At the same time he remembered the college at Vaugirard, so comfortable, snug and cosy, the fine trees, the warm greenhouse, the whole atmosphere of gentleness and attentive calm, of which the Principal's hand placed for an instant on his head had given him the sensation.

Ah! why had he not been left there? As this thought

recurred to him, he said to himself that perhaps here also they would refuse to receive him.

For one instant he had a terrible fear.

Drawn up to the table, round the fat register, the two Moronvals and Constant whispered as they looked at him. He caught bits of phrases, and winks which concerned him. The little woman with the long face looked at him sympathetically, and twice Jack heard her murmur like the priest :

“ Poor child ! ”

She also ?

What on earth did they all pity him for ?

There was something terrible in the compassion that he felt hanging over him. He could have cried for very shame, imputing in his childish mind this disdainful pity to some peculiarity of his costume, to his bare legs, or his long curls.

But the idea of his mother's despair at his rejection frightened him more than anything else.

All at once he saw Mademoiselle Constant draw from her bag and spread out on the old ink-stained green tablecloth a row of bank notes and gold coins.

Decidedly they would keep him.

He felt sincerely happy, poor little fellow, never guessing that it was the misery of his life, of his lugubrious life, that had just been signed there at that table.

At this moment a formidable bass voice burst forth through the stillness of the deserted garden.

“ Nonnes qui reposez sous cette froide terre. ” *

The window-panes of the parlour were still vibrating, when a short stout man, broad and thickset, with a black

* From the opera of Robert-le-Diable.

velvet hat, closely cut hair and a forked beard, noisily opened the door.

“Fire in the drawing-room!” he exclaimed with a comic stupefaction. “What a luxury! *beûh! beûh!* We must have found another little *pays chauds—beûh, beûh!*”

With a singer’s mania, and in order to verify the presence of a certain low *C* at the bottom of his subterranean register about which he was always full of pride and anxiety, the new-comer interlarded all his phrases with these “*beûh! beûh!*” a kind of hollow and dull bellowing that seemed to rise up from the very ground as he stepped along.

Catching sight of the strange lady, the child and the pile of money, he stopped short, spell-bound. An expression of astonishment, joy and stupefaction passed over his countenance, the muscles of which seemed accustomed to express very different feelings.

Moronval gravely turned to the lady’s-maid.

“Monsieur Labassindre, from the Imperial Academy of Music, our professor of singing.”

Labassindre bowed twice, three times, then, to keep himself in countenance, he gave a kick to the little nigger, who, carrying off his coal-scuttle, disappeared without saying a word.

Once more the door opened and two personages made their appearance.

One of these was very ugly, grey-haired and beardless, with a hang-dog look; his eyes were embellished by a pair of convex spectacles, and he was buttoned up to the throat in an old coat which bore on its lapels the traces of his short-sighted awkwardness.

This was Doctor Hirsch, professor of mathematics and natural science.

He exhaled a strong odour of alkali, and, thanks to all

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kinds of chemical manipulations, his fingers were many-coloured—yellow, green, blue, and red.

The last comer of all formed a singular contrast with this ridiculous figure.

A good-looking enough fellow, got up with scrupulous care, light coloured gloves, and hair affectedly thrown back, in order to heighten an interminable forehead; he had an absent, disdainful look, and his large fair much-waxed moustaches, his wide and pallid face, gave him the appearance of a sick grenadier. Moronval presented him as “our great poet Amaury d’Argenton, professor of literature.”

He, too, at the sight of the gold, had the same start of surprise as Doctor Hirsch and the singer Labassindre. His cold eye flashed, but was as quickly subdued after a circular glance cast upon the child and his maid.

Then he went up to the other professors seated round the fire, and having bowed, they speechlessly looked at each other, with faces of joyful bewilderment.

Mademoiselle Constant thought that d’Argenton had a proud mien; upon Jack he produced an indefinable sensation of repulsion and terror.

From all these present the child was to suffer, but from this one more than from all the others. One would almost have fancied that he foresaw it. On seeing him enter, Jack had instinctively felt that there was the “enemy;” and the hard glance that met his eyes chilled him to his heart’s core.

Ah! how often in the sadness of his life was he to meet that dread blue eye, sleepy under its heavy eyelids, with sudden awakenings of flashing steel of an impenetrable glitter. Eyes have been called windows of the soul, but these were such well-shuttered windows, that it might be doubted if there was a soul behind them.



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When the conversation between Mademoiselle Constant and the Moronvals was ended, the mulatto approached his new pupil, and giving him a friendly pat on the cheek:

"Come, come, my young friend," he said, "you must show us a more cheerful face than that."

The truth was that Jack at the moment of parting with the lady's-maid felt his eyes filling with tears. Not that he had any great affection for the woman, but she was part of his home, she was near his mother every day, and the separation appeared to him more definitive after the departure of this big personage.

"Constant, Constant," he repeated in a low tone, clinging to her skirts, "you will be sure to tell mamma to come and see me."

"Yes, yes, she will come, Master Jack, but you must not cry."

The child was nearly doing so, but it seemed to him that all these people were watching him, and that the professor of literature had fixed his cold and ironical eye on him, and this was enough to make him smother his despair.

The snow fell thickly.

Moronval proposed sending for a cab, but the factotum declared, to the amazement of all present, that Augustin and the brougham were awaiting for her at the end of the alley.

"A brougham—the deuce!"

"By the bye," she said, "Augustin gave me a commission. Hav'n't you a pupil here, called Said?"

"Yes, yes, certainly. A charming fellow," said Moronval.

"And a wonderful deep voice. You shall hear him," added Labassindre, leaning out and calling Said in a voice of thunder.

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An appalling howl answered him, followed by the appearance of the charming fellow.

And a big swarthy collegian entered, his tunic, like all the tunics, long worn and covering bodies in constant growth, was too narrow and too short, and was drawn in like a caftan, giving him the appearance of an Egyptian dressed up in the European style.

To complete the caricature his yellow skin was so tightly drawn over his rather round and regular features, that by its extremely parsimonious distribution, the eyes were forced to close whenever the mouth opened, and *vice versa*. The unfortunate young man with the too short an allowance of skin, positively made one long to make an incision, a prick, anything to relieve him.

He, however, remembered Augustin, the coachman, who had been in his parents' service, and used to give him all the ends of his cigars.

"What message shall I give him from you?" inquired Mademoiselle Constant, with her most amiable air.

"None," quietly replied Said.

"And how are your parents? Have you heard from them?"

"No."

"Have they returned to Egypt, as they intended?"

"Don't know—never write."

In truth this specimen of the Moronval-Decostère education was not happy in his repartees; and inspired Jack with singular reflections as he listened to them.

The indifferent air with which the young man spoke of his parents, together with all that M. Moronval had said about his desire to restore to his scholars the family life of which they had been deprived since childhood, gave him a sinister impression.

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It seemed to him that his life was now to be thrown amongst orphans, forsaken children, himself as forsaken as though he also had come from Timbuctoo or Tahiti.

He clung instinctively to the skirts of the horrid servant who had brought him there.

"Oh, tell her to come and see me, tell her to come and see me!"

And when the door closed on the furbelows of the factotum, he felt that all was indeed over, that a part of his life, his spoilt child's existence, had become a thing of the past, and that he would never again see such happy days.

As he stood against the door of the garden, weeping silently, a hand was held out to him with something black in it.

It was big Said, who to console him was offering him cigar ends.

"Take some and don't mind. I have a whole trunk full," said the interesting young man, shutting his eyes in order to allow his mouth to open and speak.

Jack, smiling through his tears, made a gesture of refusal, showing that he did not care for these delicious cigar ends, and the pupil Said, whose eloquence was but limited, remained standing in front of him, not knowing what more to say, till M. Moronval returned.

He had conducted Mademoiselle Constant to the carriage, and came back full of respectful indulgence for the grief of his new boarder.

Augustin, the coachman, had such magnificent furs, the brougham horse seemed so frisky, that little de Barancy enjoyed the benefit of the handsome appearance of the turn-out. It was most lucky for him, M. Moronval

generally having recourse, to calm the nostalgia of his little *pays chauds*, to a slashing, switching, cutting method, that had nothing to do with the Decostère system.

"That's right," he said to the Egyptian, "try and amuse him. Play together at some game, but go at once into the hall, where it's warmer than here. I give a holiday till to-morrow in honour of the new boy."

Poor new boy!

In the large glazed rotunda, where about a dozen half-breeds were howling and playing prisoners' base, he was at once surrounded and cross-questioned in a confusion of incomprehensible jargons. With his fair curls, his plaid, his bare legs, motionless and shy amidst the frantic gesticulations of all these vivacious and lean little *pays chauds*, he looked like an elegant little Parisian who had strayed into the large monkey cage at the Zoological Gardens.

This idea which struck Moronval amused him very much, but he was recalled from his silent mirth by the sound of a violent discussion, in which the "*beûh ! beûh !*" of Labassindre and the solemn thin voice of Madame Moronval were carrying on a terrible fight. He guessed immediately what was taking place and hurried to the succour of his wife, who was heroically defending the quarter's money against the claims of the professors to whom considerable arrears were owing.

Evariste Moronval, a lawyer and a literary man, had come from Pointe-à-Pitre to Paris in 1848, as secretary to a *député* for Guadeloupe.

At that time he was a fellow of some twenty-five years of age, full of ambition and greed, deficient neither in intelligence nor learning. Without fortune, he had

accepted this position of a dependant in order to defray the expenses of the journey, and to reach that terrible Paris, whose flame spreads so far over the world that it attracts even the colonial moths.

No sooner had he landed than he abandoned his *député*, made a few acquaintances and threw himself headlong into speechifying, gesticulating politics, hoping to repeat the former successes of distant climes. But he had calculated without the Parisian chaff, and the unfortunate creole accent which he could never get rid of notwithstanding all his efforts.

The first time he spoke in public, at some press prosecution I believe, he made a violent onslaught against all the *miséables quoniques qui déshonoient la littérature*,* and the uproarious burst of laughter with which his speech was received warned poor "Evaïste Moronval" of the difficulty he would have in making himself a name as a pleader.

He therefore decided on writing, but he soon perceived that it was not as easy to become famous at Paris as at Pointe-à-Pitre. Very proud, spoilt by his home success, and very violent, he passed through the staff of several papers, but could not remain on any.

Then he began that terrible life of hardship and privations which either breaks a man at once, or hardens him for ever. He became one of the ten thousand poor devils, starving and proud, who, getting up every morning in Paris dizzy with hunger and ambitious dreams, devour in the street by tiny mouthfuls a halfpenny loaf hidden away in their pockets, blacken their coats with a penful of ink, and whiten their shirt collars with billiard chalk, having no other warmth for their poor limbs but what

* The miserable chroniclers who dishonour literature.

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they can get near the hot-water pipes of churches or museums.

He knew every humiliation, every misery; credit stopped at the cookshop, key of his room refused at eleven o'clock at night, candles too short for night-work, boots that sucked up the rain.

He became one of those professors of anything, who uselessly ramble through the streets of Paris; he wrote humanitarian pamphlets, articles for encyclopædias at half a farthing a line, a history of the middle ages in two volumes, at twenty shillings per volume, summaries, text-books, and copied plays for different firms.

Teacher of English in schools, he was turned away for having, by an old creole habit, beaten his pupils. Then he became a candidate for the place of under-clerk at the Morgue,\* but failed from want of interest, and also on account of a certain political denunciation.

At last, after three years of this horrible life, when he had eaten any amount of black radishes and raw artichokes, when he had lost his illusions and ruined his digestion, chance threw in his way some English lessons in a young ladies' school kept by three sisters, the demoiselles Decostère.

The two eldest were over forty, the third had just reached thirty. Small, sentimental and full of affectation, the inventor of the method Decostère was threatened, like her sister, with life-long celibacy, when Moronval proposed, and was accepted.

Once married, they lived for some time in the house, where they both made themselves useful by giving lessons. But Moronval had retained from his life of misery, certain habits of the idler, of the café, and a long

\* The dead-house.

train of Bohemian friends who invaded the quiet and respectable boarding-school. Moreover, the mulatto trained his pupils as he would have conducted a sugar-cane plantation. The old Decostère ladies, who adored their sister, were, however, obliged to separate from the married couple, giving them an indemnity of some twelve hundred pounds.

What should they do with the money ?

At first Moronval wanted to found a newspaper, a review ; but the fear of losing his little hoard outweighed the pleasure of seeing himself in print.

Above all, he must seek for a sure way of getting rich, and it was while engaged in this search that one day a bright idea dawned on him.

He knew that children were often sent from the most remote countries to be educated in Paris. They are sent from Persia, from Japan, from Hindostan, from New Guinea, and confided to the care of the captains of merchant vessels or to men of business, who are responsible for them.

All these little folk are generally well provided with money, and inexperienced enough as to the modes of employing it. Moronval understood that here to his hand lay a mine easy of exploration. Moreover, Madame Moronval-Decostère's system could be perfectly well applied to correcting all kinds of foreign accents and defective pronunciations. The mulatto had recourse to some connections he had kept up with the colonial papers, to have inserted an astounding advertisement made out in several languages, and reproduced in the Marseilles and Havre papers between the names of the sailing vessels and extracts from the *Bureau-Veritas*.

In the very first year the nephew of the Iman of Zanzibar and two magnificent blacks from the Guinea

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coast made their appearance at Batignolles, in the little apartment of Moronval, henceforth too small for his business. It was then that he started in quest of larger premises, and in order to reconcile economy with the requirements of his new position, he hired, in that frightful Passage of the *Douze-Maisons*, embellished by such a fine iron gate on the Avenue Montaigne, the buildings abandoned by an equestrian photographer who had recently failed, horses having always refused to enter such filthy quarters.

The abundance of window-panes in the new school might have been objected to, but it was to be only temporary, for the photographer had led Moronval to expect an early expropriation for some imaginary road in this quarter already split up in every direction by so many unfinished avenues.

A boulevard was to pass through, the plan was already under consideration, and the agitation caused in the arrangements of the Moronvals by this prospect of future indemnity may well be imagined. The dormitory would be damp, the play-room would in summer attain the temperature of a hot-house. All this did not matter. The important question was to obtain a long lease, to put up over the door a fine gilded placard, and then—to wait.

How many Parisians, in the last twenty years, have ruined their faculties, fortunes and lives in this fever of expectation! It took violent possession of Moronval. The education of his scholars, their comfort, became the least of his concerns.

In face of urgent repairs, he would say, "This state of things won't last!" or "In two months' time all will be changed."

And then the most fantastic plans would follow, based


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upon the enormous sum he was to realize by the expropriation. He would then continue his enterprise for his little *pays chauds* on a much wider scale, and make of it a grand, civilizing and most productive affair.

Meanwhile he neglected his Gymnase, spent his time in uselessly running hither and thither, and each time on his return home would ask nervously :

“ Well ? have they come about the expropriation ? ”

But no one ever came.

What could they be waiting for ?

At last he understood that he had been duped ; and discouragement easily degenerated in this indolent and passionate creole nature into pitiful faint-heartedness. The pupils were no longer even looked after. Nothing more was demanded of them than to go to bed early so as to spare lights and fuel.

Their days were divided between some vague undetermined hours of class, according to the caprice of the director, and running all sorts of errands for his personal service.

At the beginning, the elder ones followed the classes at a public school ; but that expense was cut down, although still entered in the quarterly accounts.

Would not private masters advantageously replace the hackneyed university routine ? And Moronval summoned around him his old coffee-house acquaintances, a doctor without a diploma ; a poet without an editor ; a singer without an engagement ; men of no talent, withered fruits, *failures* in every sense, like himself furious against a society that would not recognize their genius.

Have you noticed how these men seek each other in Paris—how they draw together, how they gr up around each other, propping up one another by their complaints, their cravings. their idle and sterile vanity ? Filled in

reality with mutual contempt, they yet form an indulgent, admiring audience, outside which all is void.

Fancy what must have been the lessons of such professors ; lessons scantily remunerated, and which for the most part were spent in discussions over a glass of beer, amid tobacco smoke so thick that at last they could neither see nor hear. And yet they spoke loud, snatching the words from each other's mouths, pursuing the few ideas they had to the verge of absurdity, in a peculiar vocabulary where art, science, and literature, dragged about in all directions, misshapen, torn, gave way in tatters like precious materials under the action of corrosive acids.

And the little *pays chauds*, what became of them in all this?

Madame Moronval alone, kept up the good traditions of the Decostère school, and took up her part seriously ; but the mending, the cooking, the care of this large dilapidated establishment absorbed the greater part of her time.

It was at least necessary that for going out, the uniforms should be tidy, for the pupils were very proud of their tunics, which were indiscriminately bedizened with lace up to the elbows. At the Gymnase Moronval, as with certain armies in South America, there was nothing lower than a sergeant, but that was a very slight compensation for the sadness of exile, and the ill-treatment of the master.

For the mulatto was no joke ! During the early days of the quarter, while his coffers were filling, he still smiled ; but the remainder of the time he freely revenged himself on the darkies, for the nigger blood that ran through his veins.

His violence completed what his indolence had begun.

Some of the guardians, shipowners or consuls, became suspicious about the improved system of education at the

Gymnase Moronval. Several of the children were taken away. From fifteen in number, the little *pays chauds* dwindled down to eight.

"Limited number of pupils" said the prospectus. That was the only phrase that remained true.

A dismal melancholy reigned over the large empty establishment, and it was on the verge of being seized for debt when suddenly little Jack made his appearance, brought there by Constant.

Certainly, it was not a fortune, this quarter paid in advance, but Moronval had understood all the advantages that might be derived from the position of the new pupil, and from the queer mother whom he already divined without knowing her.

And so that day there was a short respite from the severities and rages of the mulatto. There was a grand dinner in honour of the new pupil, at which all the professors assisted, and the little *pays chauds* had a drop of wine, a treat they had not enjoyed for many a day.





III.

GRANDEUR AND FALL OF THE  
KING MÂDOU-GHÉZÔ.



This is the condition to which the last descendant of the powerful  
Tocodonou is reduced !



IF the Gymnase Moronval still exists, as I love to believe, I beg to call the attention of the sanitary inspectors to the dormitory of that factory as the dampest and most unhealthy place in which

children have ever been made to sleep.

Imagine a long ground-floor building, without a window; lighted only from on high by glass let into the roof, and impregnated with an indelible odour of collo-

dion and ether from having been formerly used for the preparation of photographic chemicals. The thing was situated at the further end of one of those dark dingy Parisian gardens surrounded by walls covered with ivy which throw a mouldy atmosphere over all they overshadow.

The dormitory was built by the side of a superb private mansion, over against a stable filled with the ceaseless noise of trampling horses ; and the sound of an ever spouting pump completed the sodden aspect of this rheumatism trap with its walls marked half-way up by a sinister band of green like a high-water mark.

From one end of the year to the other it was always damp, with this difference, that according to the seasons it was a very hot or a very cold dampness. In summer, the shut-up box, over-heated by its glass roof, evaporated in the freshness of the night all the concentrated heat of the day, and perspiring through its cracked walls, became filled with mist like the veriest bath-house.

Moreover a crowd of insects inhabiting the old ivy, attracted by the light of the glass, penetrated through the tiniest chinks, flew and coursed over the ceiling, humming and buzzing and flopping heavily down on the beds, tempted by the whiteness of the sheets.

The winter's damp was less unhealthy. The cold fell from the skies with a sparkling of stars, rose up from the earth through the cracks in the partitions and thin flooring ; but the boys could cower under the blankets, curl up their knees, and at the end of a couple of hours be tolerably warm.

Moronval's paternal eye had at once understood the use to be made of this dreary kind of barn, isolated among heaps of dirty sweepings, and covered with the shady hue that rain mixed with Paris smoke so quickly throws over neglected buildings.



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"Here will be the dormitory," the mulatto had said without hesitation.

"It will perhaps be a little damp," Madame Moronval timidly suggested.

He sneered :

"Our little *pays chauds* will be kept cool."

In truth there was room for ten beds, but he put in twenty, with a washstand at the end, a poor carpet at the door, and it became what he pompously called the dormitory.

Why not, after all ? A dormitory is a place where one sleeps ; and the children slept there, in spite of the heat, cold, want of air, insects, the noise of the pump and the furious stamping of the horses. They got rheumatism, ophthalmia, bronchitis ; but they slept soundly, peaceful and smiling and sighing, seized with the delicious numbness of sleep after their games, exercises and thoughtless days.

Oh, blessed days of childhood !

However, the first night Jack could not close his eyes. He had never slept in a strange house, and the difference was great between his little room, lighted by a night-lamp, full of his favourite toys ; and the dark, queer place in which he now found himself.

As soon as the pupils were in bed, the black servant had carried away the lamp, and since then Jack had remained awake.

By the dim glimmer that came through the snow-covered glass, he gazed at the iron beds placed foot to foot the whole length of the hall, most of them flat and empty, their blankets rolled up at one end ; seven or eight only were occupied, bulged out by the motions of the sleepers and animated by their breathing, or snoring, or hollow cough smothered under the sheets.

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The new boy had the best place, slightly protected from the draught of the door and the stable's noises. Nevertheless he was not at all warm, and the cold, added to the unknown life he was about to enter, kept his eyes wide open. Lulled by a vague sort of wakeful dreaminess, he recalled the whole of the long dreary day, with flashes of minute details as so often happens in a dream, when our thoughts, though broken by wide blanks, hang together by the brilliant threads of memory.

Thus the white tie of Moronval, his grasshopper outline and elbows tightly pressed against his body sticking out behind his back like legs, the enormous convex spectacles of Dr. Hirsch, his stained and bespattered coat, rose up in the child's mind ; and above all, oh, above all, the haughty, icy, ironical and steely glance of "the enemy."

His terror at that last recollection was such that involuntarily his thoughts flew to his mother for protection. What was she doing at this moment? Eleven o'clock was striking from all kinds of distant clocks. No doubt she was at a ball or a theatre. She would soon be returning home, muffled up in her furs and the lace of her hood.

Whenever she returned home, however late the hour, she would open Jack's door, come to his bedside and say, "Are you asleep, Jack?" Even in his sleep he felt her presence near him, and he smiled, put up his face and through his half-shut eyelids saw the gorgeousness of her attire. She passed like a radiant and fragrant vision, as if some fairy had come down to him in an orris-scented cloud.

And now?

Nevertheless, amidst all the sadness of that day, his vanity had been a little flattered by the lacings, the cap,

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the delight at hiding his long legs under a blue and red uniform. The costume was rather long, but it was to be arranged. Madame Moronval had even pinned the seams that were to be taken in. Then he had played, made acquaintance with his queer comrades, who, in spite of their ferocious looks, were good fellows. They had snow-balled one another in the bracing cold air of the garden, a new and charming sensation for a child brought up in the hot-house atmosphere of a pretty woman's boudoir.

Only, one thing puzzled Jack. He would have liked to have seen His Royal Highness. Where was this little King of Dahomey, of whom M. Moronval spoke so eloquently?

Away for his holidays? In the infirmary? Ah! if he could only know him, talk with him, become his friend! He had asked the names of the eight little *pays chauds*. Not the smallest prince had he found amongst them. At last he made up his mind and inquired of big Said, "Is not His Royal Highness at school here?"

Upon which, the young fellow with too tight a skin had stared at him with round eyes, so wide opened that he managed to close his mouth for a moment. He immediately took advantage of the opportunity, and Jack's question remained unanswered.

The child still thought over the matter as he restlessly turned in bed listening to the music; for at intervals the sound of an organ came from the house mingled with the hollow notes of the man called Labassindre, and blended melodiously with the noise of the pump still in motion, while the kicks of the neighbour's horses shook the surrounding walls.

At last all was quiet.

In the dormitory as well as in the stables all were asleep, and Moronval's guests closing the iron gate of the

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alley, had moved away and disappeared in the distant rolling sounds of the avenue, when the door of the dormitory, thickly padded with snow, opened silently.

The little black servant entered with a lantern in his hand.

He shook himself briskly, a comical sight under the thick white flakes that made his swarthy skin look blacker, and with bent back and head sunk between his shoulders, he advanced towards the beds, shrivelled and shivering.

Jack stared at the ludicrous outline, whose lengthened shadow on the wall, exaggerated and grotesque, threw in high relief all the defects of the monkeyish head, the projecting mouth, the enormous standing-out ears, the bullet-shaped cranium, prominent and woolly.

The little nigger hung up his lantern at the end of the dormitory, lighting it up like between decks on board ship. He remained standing there, his big hands benumbed with chilblains, and his ashen face turned towards the warmth and light, with such a good-natured, child-like and confiding expression that Jack felt at once that he should like him.

While he warmed himself, the little nigger looked from time to time at the glass dome.

"So much *sno'* ! So much *sno'* !" he repeated shivering.

His way of pronouncing the word snow, the accent of his gentle voice, rendered uncertain by a foreign language, touched little Jack, who gave him a glance full of pity and commiseration. The negro perceived it, and said in a low voice: "Ah, the new boy. Why you no sleep, massa ?"

"I cannot," said Jack, with a sigh.

"It does good sigh when unhappy," replied the nigger, and he added in a sententious tone: "if poor man had no sigh, poor man soon choke."

As he spoke, he spread a blanket on the bed next to Jack's.

"Do you sleep there?" inquired the latter, rather astonished that a servant should occupy the same dormitory as the pupils. "But there are no sheets?"

"No good for me, sheets—me, too black skin."

The negro made this reply with a little laugh, and he was preparing to slip into bed, half dressed so as to be less cold, when he suddenly stopped, drew from his breast an ivory carved box, and kissed it fervently.

"Oh what a funny medal!" Jack said.

"No medal," said the negro. "It's my *gri-gri*."

But Jack did not know what a *gri-gri* was, and the other lad explained to him that it was the name for an amulet, something that brought good luck. His aunt Kérika had given it to him before he left his country; his aunt who had brought him up, and whom he hoped he would go and join some day soon.

"As I shall Mamma," said the little Barancy.

There was a moment's silence, each of the children thinking of his Kérika.

After a minute or two, Jack resumed.

"Is yours a fine country? Is it very far away? What is it called?"

"Dahomey," answered the negro.

Little Jack raised himself up in bed.

"Oh, but then—but then you must know him? Perhaps you came to France with him?"

"Who?"

"His Royal Highness, you know, the little King of Dahomey."

"It's me!" said the negro, quietly.

The other one looked at him with astonishment. A King! The servant he had seen all day in his red

frippery, running about the house, a broom or a pail in his hand, whom he had seen waiting at table, rinsing the glasses!

The nigger, however, spoke quite seriously. His face wore an expression of great sadness, and his fixed eyes seemed to gaze far, very far away in the past, or towards his absent country.

Was it the absence of the red waistcoat, or the magic word King? but Jack thought the negro seated on the edge of his bed, with his bared throat, and shirt half opened, showing his dusky chest and bright ivory amulet, endowed with a new power and dignity.

"How can that be?" he asked, timidly, summing up by this question all the day's amazements.

"It is so; it is so!" said the negro.

Suddenly he jumped up to blow out the lantern.

"No pleased, Massa Moronval, when Mâdou leave light."

Then he drew his bedstead nearer to Jack.

"You no sleep," he said to him. "Me never sleep when talk Dahomey. Listen!"

And in the darkness, with his white eyes glistening, the little negro began his lugubrious tale.

He was called Mâdou, his father's name, the famous warrior Rack-Mâdou-Ghézô, one of the most powerful sovereigns of the land of gold and ivory, to whom France, Holland and England sent presents, out there, on the other side of the sea.

His father had big cannons, thousands of soldiers armed with guns and arrows, troops of elephants trained for battle, musicians, priests, dancing-girls, four regiments of Amazons and two hundred wives for himself alone.

His palace was immense, decorated with spears, shell

embroidery, and human heads that were stuck up on the frontage after battles or sacrifices. Mâdou had been brought up in that palace, where the sun entered on all sides, warming the flags and mattings. His aunt Kérika, general in command of the Amazons, took care of him, and when he was quite small, carried him about with her in her expeditions.

How beautiful she was, Kérika, big and strong like a man, dressed in a blue tunic, with her naked legs and arms covered with glass beads, her bow on her back, horses' tails floating and waving round her waist, and on her head in her woolly hair, two little antelope horns forming a crescent, as though the black warriors had kept the tradition of Diana, the white huntress.

And with what a keen eye and steady hand she would tear out an ivory tusk, or cut off at one stroke the head of an Ashantee! But if Kérika had terrible moments, she was always very gentle to her little Mâdou, giving him amber and coral necklaces, waist-cloths of silk embroidered with gold, and quantities of shells which are money in that country. She had even made him a present of a little rifle made in gilded bronze the Queen of England had sent her, that she considered too light for herself; and Mâdou used it when he accompanied her on hunting expeditions, through the vast and dense tropical forests.

There the trees were so thick, the leaves so large that the sun never penetrated through the green vaults where every sound re-echoed as in a temple. But they were light all the same, and the enormous flowers, the ripe fruit, the many-coloured birds, their plumage trailing from the highest branches down to the very ground, shone and flashed like precious stones.

The forest resounded with a busy hum, a flutter of

wings, and rustlings through the underwood. Harmless serpents waved their flat heads and forked tongues to and fro ; black monkeys at one bound cleared great distances from one tree-top to another ; and large mysterious ponds, that never reflected the skies, looked like mirrors in the immense forest, and seemed to lengthen it out underground in an endless green depth crossed by passing scintillations.

When the story reached this point Jack could no longer suppress an exclamation.

“ Oh ! how beautiful it must have been ! ”

“ Yes, very beautiful,” replied the little nigger, who perhaps exaggerated a little, and saw his country through the prism that absence lent to it, and the magical influence of his childhood’s recollections, and the gilded enthusiasm of a sunlit race.

“ Oh, yes, very beautiful.”

And encouraged by his comrade’s attentive air, he continued his story.

At night the forests changed their aspect.

They bivouacked in the jungles, before large fires which kept off the wild animals that prowled around, making a howling circle round the flames. The birds also were disturbed amongst the branches ; and the bats, silent and black as night, fascinated by the fire-light, dashed across it in their quick flight, gathering together towards morning in an immense tree, where they stuck tightly wedged one against the other, like fantastic leaves, withered and dead.

With this outdoor life, full of adventures, the little King became strong and clever at all kinds of warlike exercises, handling the sabre and hatchet at an age when most children clung to their mothers’ skirts.

The King Rack-Mâdou-Ghézô was proud of his son,



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his heir to the throne. But alas ! it seems that it is not enough even for a negro prince to know how to wield a sword or send a straight bullet into an elephant's eye ; he must also read in the white man's book, understand their writing to be able to carry on with them the gold-powder trade ; for, said the wise Rack-Mâdou to his son : " White man always paper in pocket to laugh at nigger."

No doubt they might have found in Dahomey some European learned enough to teach the young prince ; the French and English flags floated over the factories on the coast as on the mastheads of the ships anchored in port. But the King had himself been sent by his father to a city called Marseilles, far away, at the other end of the world, to become very learned, and he insisted on his son's receiving the same education.

What a despair it was for the little King to part from Kérika, to leave his sabre in its scabbard, his rifle hanging on the walls of the hut, and to start off with " Massa Bonfils," a white man belonging to the factory who went every year to put away securely the gold dust stolen from the poor blacks !

Mâdou however, submitted to his fate. He too wished some day to be king, to command his father's Amazons, to possess all his fields of corn and maize, his palaces full of red earthen jars where the palm oil cooled, all the piled-up gold and ivory, and red lead and coral. To obtain all this wealth he must deserve it, be capable if necessary of defending it, and Mâdou already thought that it was a hard task to be King ; that if he had more enjoyments than other men, he had also more trouble and responsibility.

This departure gave rise to great public festivities, sacrifices to the fetiches and sea divinities. The temples were thrown open for the solemnity, all the idle people

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were engaged in prayer, and at the last moment, when the ship was setting sail, the executioner conducted to the seaside fifteen Ashantee prisoners whose heads fell, dripping and resounding, into a large red copper basin.

“Good gracious!” interrupted Jack in dismay, cowering under his blankets.

The fact is, it is not a comfortable thing to hear stories of this kind related by those who have been the heroes of them. It was enough to terrify the bravest, and to feel reassured it was necessary to remember as quickly as possible that one was in the Moronval establishment, in the midst of the Champs Elysées, and not in that terrible kingdom of Dahomey.

Mâdou, perceiving the emotion of his audience, did not dwell on the national rejoicings that preceded his departure, and passed on rapidly to his stay in the public school at Marseilles.

Oh! that large school, with its dark walls, its mournful study full of mouldy benches where the names of the pupils carved with penknives revealed the prison-like pastimes. The professors emphasizing the dinginess of their costume by their velvet caps and the pompous solemnity of their large sleeves; the voice of the usher calling out, “Silence there!” And all those bent heads, the scratching of the pens, the monotonous lessons repeated some twenty-five times, as though each child snapped up in his turn, in the close atmosphere of the class-room, the same scrap of learning; and the large refectories, the dormitories, the barrack-like yard lighted by a sunshine so short and narrow, so pitifully bestowed in the morning here, in the evening there, and so snugly ensconced in the corners, that in order to feel it, inhale and enjoy it, it was necessary to lean back against the big black walls which absorbed it.

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Mâdou's play-hours were spent in that manner.

Nothing amused him, nothing interested him ; one thing only, the drum that announced the meals, class hours, getting up or going to bed, and which, in spite of its mean uses, made the heart of the little warrior King beat to the roll of its sticks. There were also the exeats, but he was deprived of them ; and for the following reason.

As soon as "Massa Bonfils" came to fetch him, Mâdou dragged him off to the port, the crowded masts and hulks of the shipping lying in rows along the quays attracting him from the very end of the street. There only was he happy, amid the smell of tar and sea-weed, amid the unloading of bales, many of which came from his own country. He fell into raptures before the out-pouring of the golden-coloured grain, the sacks and bales that sometimes bore a well-known mark.

The steamers getting up steam, and notwithstanding their immobility, already by their jerky puffs of vapour showing signs of the coming voyage, some large vessel setting her sails, making her rigging taut, tempted him, for they spoke of departure and freedom.

For hours he would stand gazing towards the setting sun, at a fast vanishing sail spread out like a gull's wing, or at a slight cloud of smoke like the puff of a cigar, which seemed to follow the brilliant luminary in its course, and sink with it below the horizon.

All through his lesson-hours Mâdou thought of these ships. It was indeed a true image of his return home to the country of light ; a bird had brought him, he thought, another bird would carry him back.

And haunted by this idea, neglecting the BA, BI, BO, through which his eyes saw nothing but a blue colour, the blue of the ever-travelling sea, and the great open sky, he

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escaped one day from the school, slipped into one of the boats belonging to "Massa Bonfils," hid himself at the bottom of the hold, was discovered before starting; ran away again, and this time with such cunning that his presence on the ship was only discovered when in the Gulf du Lion. Any other child would have been kept on board, but when Mâdou's name became known, the Captain, reckoning on a reward, brought back His Royal Highness to Marseilles.

From that time forth he was more miserable than before—watched and treated like a prisoner; but his persistency did not give way. Notwithstanding all, he again escaped, concealed himself on all the ships that were starting, and was found hidden in the engine-room, or in the coal-hole, or under the piles of fishing-nets. When he was brought back, he never rebelled, but his sad little smile made it impossible to punish him.

At length the Principal refused any longer to accept the responsibility of so artful a pupil. Send back the little prince to Dahomey? Massa Bonfils dared not do it lest he should lose the good graces of Rack-Mâdou-Ghézô, whose royal stubbornness he well knew. In the midst of these perplexities, the Gymnase Moronval advertisement made its appearance in the *Sémaphore*. The little nigger was immediately dispatched to 25, Avenue Montaigne, in the finest quarter of Paris, where he was—I beg you to believe—received with open arms.

It was a mine of wealth for the Gymnase, and a living advertisement, this little black, son and heir of a distant kingdom. How they exhibited and promenaded him! Monsieur Moronval showed him at the theatres, races, along the great boulevards, just as tradesmen send a hired cab covered with bills puffing up their establishments through the streets of Paris.

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He took him to receptions, to the clubs, where he made his entrance with the solemnity of Fénelon conducting the Duc de Bourgogne, when they announced: "His Royal Highness the Prince of Dahomey and his tutor Monsieur Moronval." For months, the gossiping papers were filled with anecdotes and repartees attributed to Mâdou; one of the editors of the *Standard* even came from London on purpose to see him, and they had a serious financial and administrative conversation on the manner in which the prince intended to govern his state some day, on his opinion about parliamentary representation, on compulsory education, &c. The English paper reproduced this curious dialogue at the time, both questions and answers. The answers, undecided and vague, were generally unsatisfactory. However, the following sally was remarked, when Mâdou being asked his opinion on the liberty of the press, had replied, "Every thing ate, good to eat; every word spoken, not good to say."

At one stroke, all the expenses of the Gymnase Moronval were paid by this pupil; "Massa Bonfils" settled the bills without a remark. Mâdou's education was, however, rather neglected. He got no further than A B C, and the method Moronval-Decostère found him stubbornly restive to its charms; but there was no harm in that, the years of school-life multiplying in inverse ratio to the young King's progress.

He retained, therefore, his faulty pronunciation, his half babyish talk, which, suppressing the tenses of the verbs, imparts a certain personality to the phrase, and seems like the effort of a race barely emerged from the dumbness of the animal kingdom. Withal, spoiled, petted, admired, the other little *pays chauds* were taught to amuse him, to submit to him; a difficult thing at first,

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on account of his terribly dark complexion, which in almost every exotic country is a mark of slavery.

And the professors,—what indulgence, what amiable smiles they had for the little black ball, who in spite of his intelligence was impervious to all the benefits of education, and who, under his thick woolly hair cherished an ardent recollection of his country and an utter contempt for the trash they tried to inculcate! Each one at the Gymnase built hopes on the future monarch, already strong and powerful, as though Mâdou were marching through Paris under feather fans, fringed canopy and clustered lances in the retinue of his father.

When Mâdou would be King!

It was the burden of all their conversations. Directly Mâdou was crowned, they would go out there, all together. Labassindre dreamt of regenerating the savage music of Dahomey, and already saw himself director of a *conservatoire* and precentor of the royal chapel. Madame Moronval-Decostère hoped to apply her method on a grand scale in large class-rooms, where she pictured to herself numberless mats black with little squatting pupils. But Doctor Hirsch in his dreams fancied the brats lying in endless rows of beds, and himself carrying out all the dangerous experiments of his fantastic and unauthorized doctoring, without the police venturing to meddle with him.

The first part of his stay in Paris seemed very pleasant to the little King, in consequence of this surrounding adoration, and then Paris is the city in the world where life is least wearisome for the exiled, perchance because there is in its atmosphere a little of the atmosphere of all other countries.

If only the heavens had also smiled, instead of incessantly streaming down a drizzling cutting rain, or becom-

ing enveloped in whirlwinds of white fluff in that snow so like the open ripe cotton seed ; if the sun, tearing asunder the dull gauze in which it was continually wrapped up, had given out some real heat, and finally if Kérika with her quiver, her bronze gun, her bare arms loaded with bracelets, had from time to time made her appearance in the Passage des Douze Maisons, Mâdou would have been perfectly happy.

But his lot suddenly changed.

One day "Massa Bonfils" came to the Gymnase Moronval bringing terrible news from Dahomey. The King Rack-Mâdou-Ghézô was dethroned, and prisoner of the Ashantees who had conquered the country and founded a new dynasty. The royal troops, the regiment of Amazons, all had been beaten, dispersed, massacred ! and Kérika, who had escaped by a miracle, and was a refugee in Bonfils' factory, sent word to implore Mâdou to remain in France, and carefully to preserve his *gri-gri*.

For it was written : if Mâdou did not lose the talisman he would yet reign.

That idea was indeed necessary to keep up the spirits of the poor little King. Moronval, who did not believe in the *gri-gri*, presented his bill—and what a bill!—to "Massa Bonfils," who again paid, at the same time warning the schoolmaster that for the future, if he consented to keep Mâdou, he must not rely on an immediate remuneration, but trust in the gratitude and beneficence of the King as soon as the chances of war had re-instated him on the throne. The choice lay between this uncertain fortune and an absolute renunciation. Moronval replied with dignity, "I will take charge of the child !"

Already it was no longer His Royal Highness.

All respect being set aside, there remained none of the

attentions or care that had been lavished on the little negro. Each one owed him a grudge for a personal disappointment, and for the general ill-humour. At first he became an ordinary pupil, exactly similar to the others, even to the very buttons of his uniform ; scolded, punished, corrected, sleeping in the dormitory, subjected to the common lot.

The little fellow was at a loss to understand it all, and tried in vain his pretty ways, his little grimaces formerly so much admired, but now received with a strange coldness.

Matters became far worse, when, after several quarters, Moronval receiving no money began to consider Mâdou as a useless mouth to feed. From the grade of pupil he went down to that of an inferior. As the servant had, out of economy, been sent away, Mâdou replaced him, not, however, without rebellion. The first time a broom was placed in his hand, and he was shown the use of it, he obstinately refused to obey. But Monsieur Moronval possessed irresistible arguments, and after a severe thrashing the child submitted.

Moreover, he preferred sweeping to learning to read.

The little King therefore swept and polished with singular ardour and perseverance, and the result was to be seen in the brightness of Moronval's drawing-room. But this did not soften the grim temper of the mulatto, who could not forgive him the disappointment of which he was the involuntary cause.

In vain did Mâdou strive to polish everything, to give a varnish of cleanliness to the dilapidated dwelling ; in vain did he gaze at his master with coaxing glances, the quivering humility of a submissive dog—for all reward he only received some cuts with a cane.

“Never pleased ! never pleased !” the little nigger

would say with a despairing expression. And the Paris sky seemed to become blacker, the rain more ceaseless, the snow more abundant and cold.

Oh, Kérika! Aunt Kérika, so loving and so proud, where are you? Come and see what they have made of the little King, how harshly he is treated, how badly he is fed, how he is dressed in tatters, without pity for his shivering little body. He has only one decent suit now, his livery a red jacket, a striped waistcoat and a galooned cap.

When he accompanies the master he no longer walks as an equal by his side, but follows ten steps behind. And yet this is not the worst.

From the hall he passes on to the kitchen, and from the kitchen, as his honesty and ingenuity are remarked, he is sent with a large basket to market at Chaillot.

This is the condition to which the last descendant of the powerful Tocodonou, the founder of the Dahomian dynasty, is reduced—sent to haggle over the provisions for the Moronval establishment! Twice a week he was to be seen going up the long street of Chaillot, skirting the walls, thin, ailing, shivering, for he is cold now, always cold, and nothing can warm him, neither the violent exercises to which he is condemned, nor the blows, nor the shame of becoming a servant, nor even his hatred for Father with the big stick, as he calls Moronval.

It was very strong though, that hatred.

Ah! if Mâdou some day were King again! His heart bounded with rage at the thought, and he ought to have been heard telling Jack his schemes of revenge:

“When Mâdou returns to Dahomey, he write kind little letter to Father with big stick, make him come to Dahomey, and cut his head off in large copper basin; after with his skin cover a big war-drum to go against the Ashantees. Zim! boum! boum!”

Jack saw two little tigerish eyes shine through the shadows, darkened and softened by the reflection of the snow, while the negro gently tapped his hand against the edge of the bed imitating the sound of the war-drum. Little de Barancy was terrified, and for a few minutes the conversation stopped. Buried in his blankets, his head full of all he had just heard, the "new boy" fancied he saw the flash of swords, and fearfully held his breath.

Mâdou, excited by his story, longed to continue talking, but he thought his comrade asleep. At last Jack uttered one of those deep sighs which seem to come from the boundless space that dreams rush through in a second and out of the depth of a nightmare.

"You not sleep, massa," softly inquired Mâdou; "we still talk together?"

"Yes, I am quite willing," replied Jack, "only we will not speak any more of your ugly drum or the large red copper basin. It frightens me too much."

The negro gave a little laugh, and said in a good-humoured tone :

"No, no, massa. No more talk of Mâdou; talk of you, now. What is your name?"

"Jack, with a *κ*. Mamma is very particular about that."

"She very rich—your Mamma?"

"If she is rich. . . . I should think so," said Jack, who in his turn was not sorry to dazzle the little King. "We have a carriage, a fine house on the boulevard, horses, servants, everything. And then you'll see when Mamma comes to see me, how beautiful she is. Every one in the street looks at her. She has fine dresses and jewels. *Bon Ami* is quite right in saying he does not refuse her anything. When Mamma wished to come to Paris, 'twas he brought us. Before that we were at Tours. That's a pretty

country. We lived on the Mall, and often went out walking in the Rue Royale, where there are excellent cakes and many officers in fine uniforms. Ah! I had lots of fun, I can tell you. All the gentlemen spoiled me, hugged me. I had Papa Charles, Papa Léon—Papas for fun, you know, for my own father died long ago, and I never knew him. When we were in Paris at first I felt rather dull at no longer seeing the trees and the country, but Mamma is so fond of me and spoils me so much, that I was soon consoled. I was dressed in the English style which is now the fashion, and my hair was curled every day to take me to the Bois de Boulogne and drive round the lake. Then, *Bon Ami* said I should never learn anything, that I must be sent to school, and Mamma took me to the Fathers at Vaugirard."

Here Jack stopped.

To confess that the Jesuits had refused to admit him, wounded his pride. In spite of the artlessness and ignorance of his age, he felt that it was something humiliating for his mother and for himself. And then this narration which he had giddily begun carried him back to the only serious preoccupation he had ever had in his life. Why would they not admit him? What was the cause of his mother's tears, and the pitying words of the Superior, "Poor child!"

"I say, massa," said the negro, suddenly. "What is a *cocotte*?"

"A *cocotte*?" replied Jack, rather astonished. "I don't know. A *cocotte* is a hen."

"Because the Father with the big stick told Madame Moronval your mother was a *cocotte*."

"What a funny idea! Mamma a *cocotte*,—you heard wrong—Mamma a *cocotte*!"

At the idea that his mother was a hen, with feathers,

wings, and claws, Jack burst out laughing, and Mâdou without knowing why, followed his example.

Their mirth soon dispelled the sinister impression of the former stories, and the two poor abandoned little fellows, after confiding to each other their wretchedness, dropped asleep with parted lips still full of laughter which the regular breathing of slumber soon changed into a thousand little confused sounds.



IV.

A LITERARY RECEPTION AT THE
GYMNASE MORONVAL.



" Ah ! Monsieur, that is superb ! You are a happy man to possess
such a talent."



CHILDREN are like men, the experience of others is of no use to them.

Jack had been terrified by Mâdou-Ghézô's story, but it soon dwindled down and lost colour in his memory just like

some terrific storm or sanguinary battle seen in a diorama.

The first months of his stay at the Gymnase were so happy, everyone was so eagerly affectionate around him,

that he forgot Mâdou's wretchedness had had the same brilliant beginnings.

At meals, he occupied the seat next to Moronval, drank wine, had his share of dessert ; while the other children, directly the fruit and cakes appeared, rose suddenly from the table as though indignant, and had to be satisfied with a peculiar kind of yellow drink expressly composed for them by Doctor Hirsch, which was called "*églantine*."

This illustrious and learned man, whose finances, to judge by his appearance, must have been in a deplorable condition, was an habitual frequenter of Moronval's school. He enlivened the meals by all kinds of scientific paradoxes, stories of surgical operations, descriptions of extraordinarily purulent diseases that he had met with in the course of his desultory reading, all of which he related with infinite gusto. In addition to this he kept the guests informed as to the death-rate and prevailing disease ; and if by chance there occurred in some distant part of the globe a case of black plague, or leprosy, or elephantiasis, he laid hold of it before any of the papers stated it, with a threatening complacency and many shakes of the head that meant, "We shall have to take care, if it reaches us !"

He was most gracious, but had, as neighbour at table, two disagreeable tricks :—first, his short-sighted awkwardness, and then a mania for putting at any and every moment into your plate, or your glass, either a drop or a pinch of something, powder or liquid, contained in a microscopic box or a suspicious-looking blue phial. The contents were most varied, for not a week passed without the Doctor making some scientific discovery ; but generally, bicarbonate of soda, alkali or arsenic (luckily in infinitesimal doses,) formed the basis of this doctoring of food.

Jack underwent these obtrusive attentions, and did not

venture to say that he thought alkali had a very nasty taste. From time to time the other professors were also invited. They all drank the health of little de Barancy, and it was something to see the enthusiasm his graceful prettiness excited, to see also how the singer Labassindre, at the first word from the new boy, would shake with a fat laugh, throw himself back in his chair, wipe his eyes on the corner of a napkin and thump with delight on the table.

Even d'Argenton, the elegant d'Argenton unbent. A wan smile lifted his moustaches, and his cold blue-grey glance looked at the child with a supercilious air of approbation.

Jack was delighted.

He did not, would not understand the shrugs and winks that Mâdou threw him, as he moved behind the guests humbly fulfilling his menial duties, with a napkin over his arm, rubbing at a plate in his hand. Poor Mâdou knew too well the value of this exaggerated praise and the hollowness of human grandeur!

He too had sat in the seat of honour, had drunk of the master's wine seasoned with the contents of the Doctor's phial. And the silver-laced tunic that Jack was so proud of was only too big for him, because it had been made for Mâdou.

The example of this illustrious fall should have put the little Barancy on his guard against pride, for his début was exactly similar to that of the little King.

Permanent recreations in which the whole of the Gymnase took part merely to please him, unheard-of flatteries and, only from time to time, in order to apply the famous system, a few lessons from Madame Moronval,—such was the order of the day. The lessons in themselves were not disagreeable, for the little dwarf was an excellent

woman, whose only fault was a constant exaggeration in the pronunciation of the simplest words. She said :-- "*estomack*, the *ouagons*, I went in a *ouagon*, we met in a *ouagon*." It was impossible to understand what she was talking about.

As for Moronval, he confessed that he had quite a weakness for his new pupil. The fellow had made every inquiry. He knew the house on the Boulevard Haussmann, and all that could be got out of "*Bon Ami*."

Accordingly when Madame de Barancy came to see Jack, as often was the case, she received an eager welcome, and found an audience ready to listen to all the silly and conceited stories she chose to relate.

At first Madame Moronval, *née* Decostère, had wished to keep up a certain dignity of manner towards a person of such light conduct ; but the mulatto had soon settled that, and with the most delicate touches, she blended the scruples of her respectable conscience with her interests as a business woman, without allowing them inordinately to clash.

"Jack, Jack ! here is your mother !" they would call out immediately the gate opened, as Ida smartly dressed, advanced towards the parlour, her hands and muff laden with cakes and sweetmeats. There was feasting for everybody. They lunched all together. Jack would make a general distribution to the little *pays chauds*, and Madame de Barancy herself would unglove one of her hands, the one most covered with rings, to take her share of the dainties.

The poor thing was so generous, money slipped so easily through her fingers, that she always brought with her cakes, all sorts of presents, fancy novelties or toys, which she distributed right and left at the haphazard of her humour.

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It is easy to imagine with what toadying phrases and common vulgar exclamations this thoughtless liberality was welcomed. Moronval alone had a smile of pity, a constrained envy at seeing money frittered away on useless trifles, when it might have been used to assist some elevated, generous, disinherited being, as himself for instance.

It was his monomania, and while he admired Ida, while he listened to her stories, he had the haggard, absent look, the frantic nail-biting, the feverish agitation of the borrower, who has his request on the tip of his tongue, and is almost angry that it is not guessed.

For a long time it had been Moronval's dream to found a Review devoted to colonial interests, and satisfy his political ambition by bringing himself constantly before his fellow countrymen, and so attain, who knows? perhaps the post of *député*. To begin operations, a newspaper appeared indispensable, even should it be abandoned later on.

He frequently talked it over with his friends the social *Failures*, and they all encouraged his idea. Ah! if they could have had an organ! What an amount of unpublished copy was waiting in those brains, what a mass of unexpressed ideas, unexpressible rather, but which they fancied they would make clearer, thanks to the distinctness of printed type.

Moronval had a vague presentiment that the mother of the new boy would defray the expenses of this Review, but he did not hurry matters, lest he should rouse the suspicions of the lady. It was necessary to flatter, to surround her, to bring about the affair slowly, so that her rather weak mind might have the time to take it in.

Unluckily, by the very fickleness of her character Madame de Barancy did not lend herself to these combi-

nations. Unintentionally she would change, by the mere fact of her ingenuousness, any conversation that did not amuse her, and listen to the mulatto with smiles and amiable but absent-minded glances rendered all the brighter from the fact that they were fixed on nothing.

"If we could give her the idea of writing," thought Moronval, and he delicately tried to insinuate that between Madame de Sévigné and Georges Sand there was a vacant place. But try to make yourself understood by a bird, which is all the time occupied in making a flutter by shaking its wings!

"She is not clever, poor woman!" said he after each of these conversations, into which the one threw all his ardour and the other all her empty gossip, he furiously biting his nails, and she talking, talking, listening neither to herself nor to anything that was said to her. No arguments could take hold of such a linnet-like brain; she must be dazzled, and Moronval succeeded in so doing.

One day that Ida was queening it in the parlour, perched up on high by all the titles, all the *de* that she added to her friends and acquaintances' names, as though she thereby strengthened her own nobility, Madame Decostère timidly said to her:

"Monsieur Moronval would like to ask you something, but he does not dare."

"Oh, tell me, tell me!" said the poor silly thing, with such an anxious longing to oblige, that the director had a great mind at once to ask a subsidy for the publication of a Review, but cunning and suspicious, he preferred being extra prudent, advancing little by little, "probing" as he said, blinking his tiger-cat eyes. Therefore he merely begged Madame de Barancy to assist at one of their public literary meetings on the following Sunday.

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On the programme they were called "Lectures on expressive reading, followed by the recital of passages chosen from the best poets and prose-writers." Needless to add that amongst these d'Argenton and Moronval invariably figured on the first line. In reality, it was a manner that these "Failures" had discovered of imposing themselves on a kind of public, by the intermediary of the indefatigable and expressive Madame Moronval-Decostère. A few friends and the representatives of the families were invited. At first these little gatherings took place once a week, but since the fall of Mâdou they had become singularly few.

In vain did Moronval blow out a candle as each guest left, thereby seriously dimming the close of the evening party; in vain did he, all the following week, dry the residue of the tea-pot on the window-sills—little sticky black lumps chiefly resembling seaweed thrown up by the tide, in order that they might be used at the next meeting; still the expenses were too great for the destitute household. One could not even reckon them as compensating advertisements, for in the evening, at that hour, the Passage of the Douze Maisons, with its lantern lighted like the single eye in the forehead of a monster, was not calculated to attract passers-by; the boldest never venturing nearer than the gate.

Now, however, it became necessary to shed a new splendour over the literary evenings.

Madame de Barancy eagerly accepted the invitation.

The idea of appearing in the drawing-room of a married woman, especially to assist at an artistic party, flattered her extremely, like some step gained in rank, in her irregular existence.

This lecture of expressive reading, "the first of a new series," was indeed a magnificent reception. Never in

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the memory of the little *pays chauds* had such prodigality been seen.

Two coloured lanterns were suspended from the acacias at the entry, the hall was ornamented by a night-light, and more than thirty candles were lighted in the drawing-room, which had been so vigorously waxed and rubbed by Mâdou for the occasion, that the extraordinary lighting was reflected in the absence of mirrors by the flooring, which added to the brilliancy of glass, all its dangerous and slippery qualities.

Mâdou had surpassed himself. At this point I must add that Moronval was much perplexed as to what part the nigger should play in the reception.

Should he leave him as servant, or for one day restore to him his lost title and splendour? The latter course was very tempting. But then who would carry round the trays, open the door and announce the guests?

Mâdou with his ebony skin was invaluable, and besides, by whom could he be replaced? The other boys had guardians in Paris, who might consider this style of education rather too free and easy, and so it was at last decided that the party would have to do without the prestige and presence of a Royal Highness.

At the stroke of eight o'clock the little *pays chauds* took up their position on the benches, and in the midst of them the fair head of little Barancy shone forth like a blaze of light on the dark background of the swarthy children.

Moronval had launched forth a quantity of invitations in the artistic and literary world, at least in that which he frequented, and from all the most eccentric quarters of Paris, the Failures in art, literature, and architecture responded by numerous deputations.

They came in shoals, freezing and shivering, from the

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further end of Montparnasse or the Ternes, on the outside of omnibuses, threadbare and solemn, all unknown yet full of genius, enticed out of the gloom in which they struggled, by a wish to show themselves, to recite something, to sing something, to prove to themselves that they still existed. Then a mouthful of fresh air once inhaled, a glimpse of the heavens once seen, refreshed by a semblance of fame and success, they will return to the bitter abyss with the strength necessary to continue their vegetation.

For it was indeed a vegetating, embryonic, unfinished race, rather like those products at the bottom of the sea, that are living beings though without motion, and lack perfume only to become flowers.

There were philosophers more learned than Leibnitz, but who seemed deaf and dumb from their birth, incapable of aught but gesticulating their ideas and uttering inarticulate arguments. Painters who feverishly longed to do something great, but who poised a chair so curiously on its legs, and a tree so oddly on its roots, that their pictures looked like views of an earthquake, or the interior of a steamboat on a rough day. Musicians, inventors of intermediary finger-boards; learned men in the style of Doctor Hirsch, with brains like old curiosity shops, that contain everything, but in which nothing can be found, on account of the disorder and dust, and also because all the wares are broken, incomplete, and utterly useless.

These were of the melancholy and woeful type, and if their ridiculous pretensions, as numerous as the hairs of their heads, if their pride, their manias made them objects of derision, such an abyss of misery was visible in their threadbare appearance, that in spite of all, a feeling of compassion seized hold of one at the fevered

brightness of the eyes intoxicated with illusions, the countenances ravaged by defeated dreams and dead hopes which had marked their place in falling.

By the side of these, were those who finding art too hard, too arid, too ineffectual, eked out their living by the most whimsical occupations, totally at variance with the preoccupations of their mind—a lyric poet keeping a register office for men servants, a sculptor selling champagne on commission, a violinist being employed at the gas works.

Others, less worthy, were maintained by their wives, whose work encouraged their genial laziness. These couples had come together, and the humble companions of the Failures bore on their plucky and worn-out faces tokens of the cost of maintaining a man of genius.

Proud of accompanying their husbands, they smiled at them like mothers, with a look which said: "It is my handiwork." And they had in truth a right to be proud, these gentlemen presenting generally a flourishing appearance.

Add to this motley crew two or three antiquated literary men, drawing-room bards, dregs of athenæums, prythaneums, and philotechnic societies, ever on the watch for these kinds of receptions; then the supernumeraries, the vague types; a gentleman who never opened his lips, but was said to be very learned because he had read Proudhon; another brought by Hirsch was called "Berzélius' nephew"; he had, in fact, no other title to fame but his relationship with the illustrious Swedish scholar and seemed a perfect fool; a comedian *in partibus* by the name of Delobelle, who, it was said, was going to take a theatre.

And finally, the habitual frequenters of the house, the three professors, Labassindre in gala costume, sounding

his "*beûh ! beûh !*" from time to time, to see if his note was all right, for he would require it in the evening, and d'Argenton, the elegant d'Argenton, his hair dressed in seraphic style, curled, pomatumed, well gloved, genial, austere and pompous.

In the doorway of the drawing-room stood Moronval, receiving his guests, shaking hands in an absent-minded way, and very much worried at seeing how time was getting on, and the Comtesse,—for that was how they called Ida de Barancy,—had not arrived.

A kind of despair seized upon the company. They talked in low voices in the corners as they settled themselves. Little Madame Moronval went from group to group, saying in an amiable manner :

"We shall not begin just yet. We are waiting for the Comtesse !" And from her lips, fraught with expression, the word Comtesse assumed extraordinary inflections, mysterious, solemn, aristocratic. And the guests repeated in whispers, each one desirous of appearing well informed, "They are waiting for the Comtesse !"

The wide-open harmonium, smiling and showing its notes like an immense set of false teeth ; the pupils in a row against the wall ; the little table ornamented with a green cloth, a shaded lamp and a glass of sugar and water, standing out on the platform, sinister and threatening like a guillotine at dawn, and Monsieur Moronval, nervous and irritated behind his white waistcoat, and Madame Moronval *née* Decostère, red as a turkey-cock in all the bustle of receiving, and Mâdou-Ghézô shivering in the night air, all, yes, all anxiously waited for the Comtesse.

However, as she did not arrive and there seemed to be a certain chill, d'Argenton consented to recite his "Credo of Love," which all present knew well, having heard it at least five or six times.

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Standing before the fire-place, with his hair flung back and head upraised as though addressing his verses to the mouldings on the ceiling, the poet declaimed in a tone as emphatic and vulgar as what he called his poem, pausing between each clap-trap line to allow the exclamations of admiration to be heard and to reach his own ears.

Heaven knows men of his audience's type are not sparing in this kind of encouragement :

"Wonderful !"

"Sublime !"

"Stupendous !"

"Hugo, but more perfect, more modern !"

And the following, the most surprising phrase of all :

"Goethe, with more feeling !"

In no wise confused, but on the contrary spurred on by this fulsome praise, the poet went on with arm outstretched and imperative gesture :

*" Et de quelques lazzi que la foule me raille—  
Moi, je crois à l'amour comme je crois en Dieu." \**

She entered.

The lyric rhymester with upturned eyes did not even perceive her. But she poor creature beheld him, and from that moment her fate was sealed.

Until now she had only seen him in his hat and great-coat, attired for the street, not for Olympus; but now, in the pale light of the opal-coloured globes under which his pallor seemed more wan, in his dress suit and light grey gloves "believing in love as he believed in God," he appeared to her a fatal and superhuman being.

He was the embodiment of all her aspirations, of all her dreams, of the silly sentimentality that lies at the

\* And however much the crowd may mock,  
I believe in love as I believe in God.

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bottom of all these women's hearts—of that thirst for pure air and ideality which seems a kind of compensation for the existence they lead, of that vague longing summed up in one word, noble in itself, but which in their mouths assumes the vulgar and degraded expression they lend to all they utter, "the artist."

Yes, from that moment she belonged to him ; he took possession of her whole being, just as he stood there with his well-parted hair, his artificially curled moustaches, his quivering upraised arm and all his poetical trumpery. She had eyes neither for her little Jack, who with frantic gestures was sending her kisses, nor for the Moronvals obsequiously bowing before her, nor did she notice the sensation she produced upon the assembled guests by the freshness of her youth, the elegance of her velvet dress and fashionable little bonnet, pink, white and aërial, with long streamers of tulle enveloping her like a gauze cloud.

She beheld him and him alone !

Long after, she would recall the deep impression that nothing was to efface, and see like in a dream her great poet as he appeared to her for the first time, standing up in the drawing-room of the Moronvals, which that evening had appeared to her immense, splendid and dazzling in the light of a thousand candles. Ah ! however much he might grieve her, humiliate her, wound her, shatter her life or something even more precious than her life, never, never could he efface the glamour of that hour.

"You see, Madame," said Moronval with his most winning smile, "we were indulging in a little prologue while awaiting your arrival. Monsieur le Vicomte Amaury d'Argenton was reciting his magnificent poem, the *Credo of Love*."

Vicomte ! he was a Vicomte !

Nothing, then, was wanting !

She turned to him, timid and blushing like a young girl :

“ Go on, Monsieur, I beg. ’

But d’Argenton declined. The entrance of the Comtesse had interrupted his poem at the most telling point, and such a crime is not easily forgiven ! He bowed and said with ironical and chilly politeness :

“ I have finished, Madame.”

And forthwith he joined the other guests without paying her any further attention.

The poor woman felt her heart sink and a vague feeling of sadness come over her. At first sight she had displeased him, and the idea was already unendurable to her. It required all the pretty ways of Jack made happy by the presence of his mother, and proud of the sensation she had produced, all the attentions of the Moronvals and their guests—the satisfaction of vanity at being the belle of the party—to efface the cruel impression which had betrayed itself by a silence that had lasted at least five minutes, which for a nature like hers was as extraordinary as it was restful.

When the disturbance caused by her entrance had subsided, each one settled down for the lecture on expressive reading. The majestic Constant who had accompanied her mistress, took her place on the back bench near the pupils. Jack leant against his mother’s arm-chair, at the place of honour, while Moronval, seated by his side, stroked his hair in a fatherly way.

The guests formed quite an imposing audience seated on rows of chairs as if for a distribution of prizes. At last Madame Moronval-Decostère took possession of the little table, the whole platform, the whole light of the lamp,

and opened proceedings by reading an ethnographic study of the Mongolian races by Monsieur Moronval.

It was lengthy, tedious, and dreary, just such a lucubration as is read at scientific meetings towards dusk, between three and five o'clock, to gently lull the slumbers of the committee. The worst of it was, that—thanks to the Moronval-Decostère method, one had not even the resource of dozing under the tedious and monotonous flow of sounds. One had perforce to listen, for the words seemed driven into one's head as with a screw, syllable by syllable, letter by letter, and the hardest of them seemed to tear one as they entered.

The finishing touch to the weariness of the listeners was the instructive and terrifying aspect of Madame Moronval-Decostère herself, in the full exercise of her method. She would open her mouth as round as an O, twist, convulse, and distort it. And at the same moment, on the benches behind, eight childish mouths would go through the same pantomime, faithfully imitating their professor in all her fantastic contortions, and giving what this excellent method defined as "the configuration of words." The movement of these eight little silent jaws produced a fantastic effect. Mademoiselle Constant looked dismayed.

The Comtesse however saw nothing of what was going on. She beheld only her poet, as he stood leaning against the drawing-room door, with his arms crossed and his eyes vacant.

He was lost in dreams.

How apparent it was that he was far away, soaring on high! His upraised head seemed listening to some mysterious voices.

From time to time his gaze would drop and descend again upon the earth, but never deign to settle on any-

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thing. The poor woman watched the wandering glance, hoped, almost begged for it; but ever in vain. It rested indifferently on all, except on herself. The arm-chair which she occupied seemed empty for him, and the poor little thing was so distressed, so upset at his indifference that she forgot to congratulate Moronval on the brilliant success of his essay which had just been brought to a close, amid the applause and sighs of relief of the audience.

After the expressive reading, came a poem of d'Argenton's accompanied by Labassindre on the harmonium.

This time, I warrant you, she listened, and all the salient points, all the sentimentality of the verses, tremulously modulated by the lingering sounds of the instrument, went to her very heart. Breathless she listened, fascinated, drowned in the great swell of harmony.

"How beautiful! How beautiful!" she said, turning to Moronval, who listened with a sickly jaundiced smile as though all his bile were overflowing.

"Will you introduce me?" she asked as soon as the poem was ended. "Ah! Monsieur, that is superb! You are a happy man to possess such a talent!"

She, the little babbler, habitually so unreserved, spoke in a low, hesitating, almost stammering voice. The poet bowed stiffly, apparently indifferent to her enraptured praise. She then inquired where his poems could be found.

"They are not to be found, Madame," he answered, in a hurt and solemn tone.

Involuntarily she had touched the sore point, and again he turned away without even looking at her.

Moronval, however took advantage of the opportunity:

"Dear me! yes," he said, "literary work is at such a low ebb. Verses like these even cannot find an

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editor. Talent, genius, lies buried, unappreciated, unrecognized, condemned to shine unseen."

And he added :

" Ah ! if we had a Review of our own ! "

" But you must have one," she quickly replied.

" Certainly, but where is the money to come from ? "

" Oh the money must be found. It is impossible to leave such masterpieces in the shade."

She was indignant, and, now the poet was no longer there, became quite eloquent.

" Well done, the affair is launched ! " thought Moronval, and understanding with his perfidious shrewdness the weak side of the lady, he talked to her about d'Argenton, taking care to endow him with the romantic and sentimental colouring that he saw she cared for.

He described him as a modern Lara, a Manfred, a noble nature, haughty, independent, that the cruelties of fate had been unable to bring to the dust. That he worked for his daily bread, and declined all government assistance.

" Ah ! that is noble," said Ida ; then still haunted by the heraldic honours which filled her imagination and which she attributed to all, more or less at haphazard, she inquired :

" He is of noble birth, is he not ? "

" Of the noblest, Madame. Vicomte d'Argenton, a descendant of one of the most ancient families in Auvergne. His father, ruined by a dishonest steward——"

And he related a hackneyed romance, with the accompaniment of an unhappy love affair with a great lady, a story of letters shown to a husband by a jealous marquise. Not a detail would she allow him to pass over, and while the two, drawing their arm-chairs closer, were whispering, the fellow they were talking over seemed not to notice

their occupation, and little Jack, uneasy at seeing his mother so engrossed, drew down on himself two or three impatient observations: "Jack, do keep quiet. Jack, you are most tiresome," which at last sent him with pouted lips and tearful eyes, to sulk in a corner of the drawing-room.

While this was going on, the performance continued.

One of the pupils, a little Senegalese, brown as a date, now came forward on the platform and recited one of Lamartine's poems: *Prière de l'enfant à son réveil*, and began as follows in a high shrill voice:

*O père qu'ado mon père,
Toi qu'on ne no qu'à genoux,
Toi dont le nom terrible et doux,
Fait courber le front de ma mère.**

Which proves that nature scoffs at methods, even at Madame Moronval-Decostère's method.

Then the singer Labassindre, after much pressing, was prevailed upon to "give his note," as he said. First he tried it two or three times, then he brought it forth lavishly, so deep, so sonorous that the drawing-room windows and the cardboard walls rattled, and from the depths of the kitchen, where he was preparing tea, Mâdou-Ghézô, filled with enthusiasm, responded by a terrible war-whoop.

He loved a noise, that fellow Mâdou!

There were also some comical incidents. In the midst of a profound silence, while a strange fabulist, who had set himself the task (he ingenuously admitted it) of re-writing La Fontaine's Fables, was reciting "*Le Derviche et le Pot de farine*," a paraphrase on "*Pierrette et le*

* Oh Père qu'adore mon père :
Toi qu'on ne nomme qu'à genoux,
Toi dont le nom terrible et doux
Fait courber le front de ma
mère.

Oh Father whom my father adores—
Thou to whom all knees bend,
Thou at whose terrible and gentle
name
My mother bows her head.


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*Pot au lait*," an altercation took place at the end of the room, between the nephew of Berzelius and the gentleman who had read Proudhon. Sharp words were exchanged, blows even; and in the midst of the scuffle, Mâdou had great difficulty in steadying the large tray laden with cakes and syrups, which he pitilessly passed in front of the greedy eyes of the little *pays chauds* to whom he had been expressly forbidden to offer anything. Twice or three times however in the course of the evening some "Églantine" was doled out to them.

Moronval and the Comtesse continued their conversation, and the elegant d'Argenton who had at last perceived the attention bestowed on him, was talking in front of them in a loud voice, rounding off fine phrases and grand gestures, so as to be both heard and seen. He appeared to be very angry. With whom could it be? With no one in particular and with the whole world in general.

He belonged to that race of human beings, embittered and disappointed, disgusted with everything without ever having been anywhere, who fulminate against the society and morals and tastes of their day, carefully, however, placing their individuality outside the universal corruption.

In this instance he had laid hold of the fabulist, a peaceful clerk in some ministerial office or another, and was saying with a malignant, scornful and threatening air:

"Hold your tongue. I know you. You are one of the rotten ones. You have all the vices of the last century and you will never have their distinguishing grace." The fabulist hung his head, overcome, and convinced. "What have you done with honour? What have you done with love? And your works where are they? They are nice, your works!"

Here the fabulist protested:

"Ah! allow me."

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But the other would allow nothing, and moreover in what way could it possibly interest him, whatever the fabulist thought? He was talking over his head, far away and above him. He would have liked the whole of France to be there to listen to him, to be able to give it a bit of his mind. He no longer believed in France. A country lost, burnt up, destroyed. Nothing was to be expected from it, neither faith nor ideas. As for him, he was quite decided not to live any longer in such a country, he should leave and expatriate himself,—go to America.

As he spoke, the poet placed himself in an irresistible three-quarter face attitude; for he vaguely guessed without seeing it, that an admiring gaze was rivetted on him. He felt the sensation that one has out-of-doors in the evening, when the waxing moon rises suddenly behind one, magnetising with its light and forcing one to turn round towards its silent presence. In reality those woman's eyes, darted upon him, threw a halo around him. He seemed handsome, so ardently did he long to appear so.

Little by little a silence fell in the drawing-room round the solemn voice which claimed such attention. But Ida de Barancy was the one most absorbed. The proposed voluntary exile to America cleverly thrown into the conversation, made her heart sink. In one instant the thirty candles of Moronvals' reception disappeared, extinguished by the sadness of her thoughts. What, however, filled the cup of bitterness was, that his departure thus settled, the poet before embarking, indulged in a most violent attack upon French women, against their frivolity, their corruption, the vulgarity of their smiles and the venality of their loves.

He no longer spoke, he thundered; leaning against the chimney-piece and facing the crowd, he spared neither his voice nor his words.

The poor Comtesse was so engrossed in him that she could not believe he was not somewhat interested in her, and thought she understood to whom he was addressing himself.

"He knows what I am," she thought, and she bowed her head under the weight of his maledictions.

All around there was a hum of admiration.

"What animation! Never has he been finer!"

"What genius!" said Moronval out loud, adding in a low tone—"What a humbug!"

But Ida did not require to be urged on. The effect had been produced.

She loved.

For Doctor Hirsch, who so eagerly sought strange pathological cases, this was an instance of spontaneous combustion offering a most curious study. But Doctor Hirsch's attention was at this moment taken up with quite another matter. He was trying to arrange, or rather to aggravate the quarrel between the nephew of Berzelius and the gentleman who had read Proudhon. Labassindre had also put in his word, and there was an amount of whispering and fussy despairing gesticulation, goings to and fro, shoulder-shruggings full of meaning, a game of apparent conciliation carried on with the sole object of getting two fellows to fight, who had not the slightest desire to do so. Moreover, no anxiety was felt. These sort of affairs, very frequent at the literary soirées of the *Gymnase Moronval*, always subsided just at the moment when they became most serious. Only they generally indicated the winding up of these little parties, at which each Failure had in turn stood by the side of the marble chimney-piece, or in front of the organ-harmonium, just the time necessary to reveal his genius.

An hour before, Madame Moronval had mercifully sent

Jack and two or three of the younger little *pays chauds* to bed. Those who remained up, yawned, strained their eyes, hypnotized by what they heard and saw.

The party broke up.

The paper lanterns, tattered by the wind, still swung at the garden door. The Passage with all its slumbering houses looked sinister, without even the policeman's step to enliven its muddy pavement. However, amongst the noisy groups, going off humming, reciting and still discussing, no one noticed the chilling cold of the night nor the damp fog that was falling.

At the entrance of the avenue, they discovered that the last omnibus had gone by. All the poor creatures bravely resigned themselves. Their gilded dreams lighted and shortened the way, their illusions kept them warm, and scattered through the deserted streets of Paris, they courageously returned to the obscure miseries of life.

Art is so great a magician ! It creates a sun which like the other one shines on all ; and those who approach it, even the poor, even the ugly, even the grotesque, carry away with them something of its warmth and radiancy. The heavenly fire so imprudently filched which the Failures retain in the depth of their soul, renders them sometimes formidable, though more often ridiculous ; but their lives are thereby imbued with a grand serenity, a contempt of evil, a grace in suffering, utterly unknown to other victims of this world's misery.

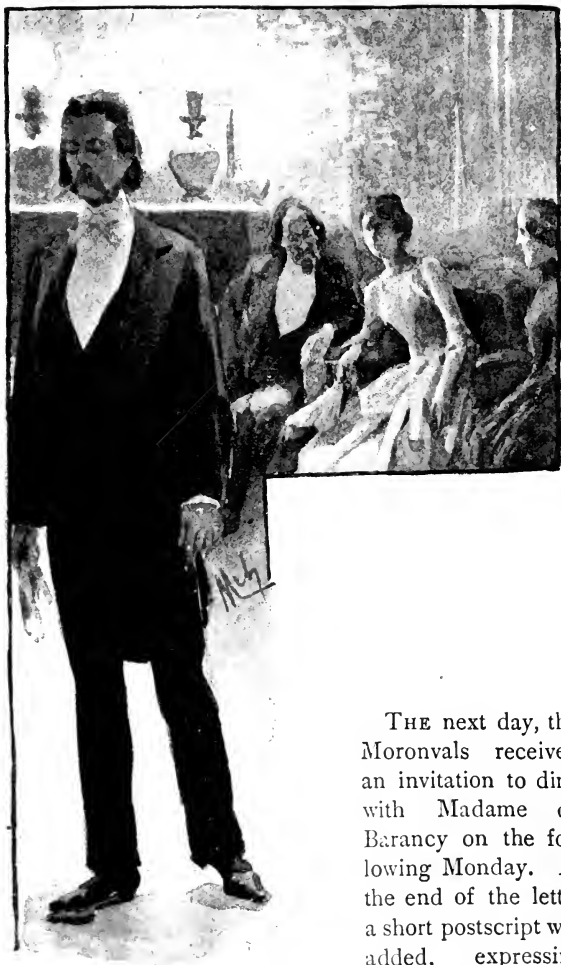


v.

SEQUEL TO THE LITERARY
RECEPTION AT THE GYMNASIUM.



And they made fine plans for the future.



THE next day, the Moronvals received an invitation to dine with Madame de Barancy on the following Monday. At the end of the letter a short postscript was added, expressing the pleasure she

would have if Monsieur d' Argenton could accompany them.

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"I shall not go," said the poet stiffly, when Moronval showed him the coquettishly scented note.

The mulatto got angry. It would be acting like an unkind friend to do that. In what way could it possibly annoy him to accept this invitation?

"I do not dine at the houses of those sort of women."

"To begin with," said Moronval, "Madame de Barancy is not at all what you fancy. And then for a friend you might sacrifice a few scruples. You know I require the Comtesse. My idea of a Colonial Review pleased her, and you are doing all you can to thwart my plan. Really, it is not nice of you."

After a great deal of pressing, d'Argenton ended by accepting the invitation.

The following Monday, having left the Gymnase under the care of Doctor Hirsch, Monsieur and Madame Moronval went off to the little hotel Boulevard Haussmann, where the poet was to join them.

The dinner hour was seven o'clock. D'Argenton only arrived at half-past seven, and it may easily be imagined that during that half-hour, it was not possible for Moronval to speak of his grand scheme.

Ida was so anxious!

"Do you think he will come? I trust he is not ill: he looks so delicate."

At last he arrived, curled and irresistible, still very stiff but less supercilious than usual, and airily apologized on the ground of his numerous occupations.

The appearance of the house had impressed him.

The fashionable quarter of the town, the profusion of carpets and flowers, beginning on the staircase ornamented by evergreen plants and ending with the little boudoir full of the scent of white lilac, the common-place drawing-room, like a dentists' reception room, with a blue ceiling



framed in gilded woodwork, the black and gold padded chairs, and the balcony, where the dust of the boulevards floated about mingled with the mortar and plaster of the neighbouring buildings, all this naturally charmed a frequenter of the Gymnase Moronval, and gave him the impression of a luxurious and refined existence.

The aspect of the dinner-table, the imposing air of Augustin, the faithful worshipper of the sun, and all the pretty details of the table which help to lend an enticing sparkle to poor wine and give a flavour to the most ordinary dishes, completed the charm. Without being so astonished or so lost in admiration as Moronval, who by repeated exclamations impudently flattered the Comtesse's vanity, the incorruptible d'Argenton became more mellow, and deigned to talk and smile.

He was an indefatigable talker, provided always that he was the topic of conversation, and that nothing interrupted his long-winded phrases—his wayward imagination being easily led astray. The result was a sententious and authoritative tone in the most trivial arguments, and a certain monotony arising from the constant recurring "I—I—" by which all his phrases began. Above all, he wanted to lord it over his audience, to feel himself listened to.

Unfortunately, listening was a virtue quite beyond the Comtesse's powers, and during dinner this led to some untoward incidents. D'Argenton loved also to repeat the cutting remarks he had delivered in certain circles to well-known personages, newspaper writers, editors, theatrical managers who had not chosen to accept his plays, nor print his prose or his verses. They were terrible words, barbed, poisonous, that scorched and rent.

But, with Madame de Barancy, he could never deliver those famous sayings, preceded as they mostly were, by

a lengthy preliminary explanation. Just as he reached the pathetic moment of the story, and that he began to say in his most solemn voice: "Then, I said to him these cruel words——"

At that very moment, the unfortunate Ida dashed into the middle of his phrase, ever occupied about him it is true, but in a manner disastrous for the speech.

"Oh! Monsieur d'Argenton, I entreat you, take a little more of this ice."

"No, thank you, Madame."

And the poet frowning, repeated still more authoritatively, "Then I said to him——"

"Don't you find it good?" artlessly inquired the other.

"Excellent, Madame—these cutting words——"

But the cutting sayings so long deferred created no effect, especially as they were generally in the following style :

"A word to the wise!" or, "Monsieur, we shall meet again;" and d'Argenton never failed to add: "and he was so vexed."

Catching sight of the severe look the interrupted poet cast upon her, Ida was in despair. "What is the matter with him? He is again displeased."

Two or three times during the dinner, she felt an inclination to cry which she strove to conceal, saying with an amiable air to Madame Moronval, "Do eat, you are taking nothing!" and to Monsieur Moronval, "You are drinking nothing!" Both remarks being dreadfully untrue, for the inventor of the method Decostère was working her jaw even more actively than on the evenings devoted to expressive reading, and her indomitable appetite was only equalled by the unquenchable thirst of Moronval.

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When dinner was over and they went into the well-warmed, well-lighted drawing-room, where the coffee seemed to exhale a perfume of intimacy, the mulatto who for the last two hours had been watching his prey, thought the propitious moment had arrived, and suddenly said in a careless manner to the Comtesse :

“I have been thinking a great deal over our affair. It will cost less than I supposed.”

“Ah,” she replied in an absent manner.

“Yes indeed. And if our charming directress would give me a few moments of serious conversation——”

“Directress” was a bold stroke, an inspiration of genius, but completely thrown away, for the *diétice*, as Moronval pronounced it, was not listening. She was watching her poet, who, silent and preoccupied, was pacing up and down the drawing-room.

“What is he dreaming about?” she thought.

He was digesting.

Slightly affected by dyspepsia, and ever anxious about his health, he never failed on leaving the table to walk for a quarter of an hour, wherever he happened to be. Anywhere else it might have seemed ridiculous, here it added to his sublimity, and instead of listening to Moronval, Ida looked at that bent forehead, furrowed by an austere line, now disappearing in the shade at the further end of the room and again reappearing in the light of the lamp.

For the first time in her life she really, passionately loved, and felt her heart beat with those full throbs that are like none other. Till then she had let herself drift to the haphazard of her life, to the vanity of her caprice, and the short or long intimacies that had hampered her, had been made and unmade without her being anything but passive.

Sufficiently silly and ignorant, of a credulous and romantic turn of mind, nearing that fatal age of thirty, which for women is ever the date of some kind of transformation, she now recalled all the novels she had read, in order to conjure up for herself an ideal that resembled d'Argenton. Her physiognomy changed so completely when she looked at him, her lively eyes became so tender, and her smile so languishing, that her passion could no longer remain a mystery to anyone.

Moronval seeing her thus timid and absorbed, shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly at his wife, which meant "She is mad!"

And in truth she was, for since dinner she had been torturing her mind trying to find some way of getting back into his good graces. At last she fancied she had found it, and as the poet drew near her, in his caged-pantherlike walk :

"If Monsieur d'Argenton would be very amiable, he would recite us that beautiful poem that had so much success the other evening at the Gymnase. I have thought of it all the week. There is one verse especially that haunts me. *Moi je, Moi je*. How is it? Ah!—

*"Moi, je crois à l'amour comme je crois au bon Dieu." **

"*En Dieu*," said the poet, making a horrible grimace, as though his finger had just been caught in a door.

The Comtesse, who was not very well versed in prosody, only understood one thing,—that she had again displeased him. In fact he was already producing upon her that stupefying impression which she was never able to throw off, and which made her love resemble

* "I believe in love as I believe in kind God."

the abject, terrified worship that the Japanese render to their fierce jade-eyed idols. In his presence, she was more silly than usual, and even lost that lively bird-like charm, those unexpected thoughts and expressions which by their constant variety hid the shallowness of her mind.

The idol however became humanized, and in order to show Madame de Barancy that he did not bear her any ill will for having murdered his verses, d'Argenton stopped for a moment his hygienic exercise :

"I am quite willing to recite something. But what ? I really know nothing."

He turned towards Moronval with the movement dear to all poets, who invariably ask advice with the firm intention of not following it.

"What must I recite ?"

"Well," replied the other, in a sulky tone, "as you are asked for the *Credo*, recite the *Credo*."

"Really, you wish for it ?"

"Ah yes," said the Comtesse, "you will give me so much pleasure."

"Very well !" said d'Argenton naturally, and taking up an attitude, raising his eyes, he thought for a moment, and then began :

*"A une qui m'a fait du mal."**

Seeing Ida's astonishment, for she had expected something quite different, he resumed in a still more solemn manner :

"A une qui m'a fait du mal."

The Comtesse and Moronval exchanged significant

* To one who has pained me.

glances. No doubt the lines were addressed to that nameless lady.

The verses began very gently, in the tone of a worldly epistle :

*" Madame, vous avez une toilette exquise." **

Then the idea became gloomy, passed from irony to bitterness, from bitterness to fury, and ended by these terrible lines :

*" Seigneur, délivrez-moi de cette horrible femme,
Qui boit tout le sang de mon cœur." †*

Then, as though this singular piece of poetry had stirred within him some sad recollections, d'Argenton refused to open his lips again during the remainder of the evening. Poor Ida too was lost in musing. Her thoughts ran upon those great ladies who had so cruelly pained her poet ; and all the time, she saw him on a pedestal, a very high one, in some aristocratic salon of the Faubourg St. Germain, surrounded by vampire women drinking all his heart's blood, without leaving a single drop for her.

" You know, my dear fellow," said Moronval, as he went off arm-in-arm with d'Argenton along the deserted boulevards, while little Madame Moronval breathlessly toiled after them, " you know if I get my Review, I shall take you as chief editor."

He thus threw overboard half the cargo, in order to save the ship, for he saw very well that unless d'Argenton took it up, he would never be able to get any-

* " Madame, you wear an elegant attire."

† " Oh God, deliver me from this horrible woman,
Who drinks up my very heart's blood."

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thing out of the Comtesse, except indeed vague words and promises.

The poet did not answer. His thoughts were far from the Review.

This woman disturbed his equanimity. It is not possible to carry on the profession of lyric poet and martyr to love, without being touched at these mute adorations, which flatter two kinds of self-love at the same time : that of the literary man, and that of the lady-killer. And since he had seen Ida surrounded by all her easily-acquired luxury, trivial like herself, but full of soft comforts, he felt invaded by an undefinable amorous languor that melted the rigidity of his principles.

Amaury d'Argenton belonged to one of those old provincial families whose manorial dwellings resemble large farms, minus their rich and plentiful look. Ruined for the last three generations, having suffered privations behind those old walls, and led the peasant life of sporting and labouring squireens, the d'Argentons had at last been obliged to sell this, their only property, leave the country and seek their fortunes in Paris.

Since then they had fallen so low, into such a state of poverty and commercial misadventure, that for more than thirty years they had dropped the particle *de* to their name. In launching forth into a literary career Amaury took up again the *de*, and the title of Vicomte to which he had a right. He hoped to render it illustrious, and with the ambitious fervour of a beginner, he uttered this impudent phrase : "I intend that it shall be said one day, 'the Vicomte d'Argenton,' as it is now said, 'the Vicomte de Châteaubriand.'"

"And the Vicomte d'Arincourt," answered Labassindre, who in his capacity of a former workman now become a singer, cordially detested the aristocracy.

The poet had a poor and unhappy childhood, cheerless and lifeless. Surrounded by anxieties and tears, by those monetary difficulties that exercise such a withering influence on children, he had never played nor smiled. A free education at Louis-le-Grand facilitating his studies which he carried on courageously to the end, maintained him in a precarious and dependent position. His only relaxation consisted in the holidays and exeats he spent with a sister of his mother's, an excellent woman, who kept a small hotel in the Marais, and who from time to time gave him a little money that enabled him to buy gloves, for his appearance was from the first one of his most cherished preoccupations.

Such sad childhoods lead to bitter maturities. Happiness in life and boundless prosperity are necessary to efface the impressions of early youth ; and one often sees rich, lucky men, in power and place, who seem incapable of enjoying their position, so painfully have their lips retained the envious curl of former deceptions, and their manner, the shamefaced timidity induced in young fresh creatures by the ridiculous old patched-up coat, cut out of the paternal clothes.

D'Argenton had good cause for his bitter smile.

At twenty-seven years of age, he had as yet only been able to publish at his own expense a volume of humanitarian poems of which no one had taken any notice, and the expense of which had reduced him to dry bread and water for six months. Nevertheless, he worked hard, was full of will and faith in himself ; but these are very useless forces in poetry, which above all needs wings. D'Argenton had none. Perhaps he felt in their place the anxiety that a missing limb imparts, but that was all ; and he lost both time and trouble in useless and unavailing efforts.



The lessons he gave just enabled him, by dint of privations, to await the end of each month, when his aunt, who had retired into the country, sent him a small allowance. All this little resembled the ideal Ida had created : the dissipated life of the society poet, borne away by success and love-intrigues through all the salons of the noble faubourg.

Naturally proud and cold, till now the poet had avoided any serious tie. The opportunities had not, however, been wanting. There are always a set of women ready to love this kind of being, and to be caught by their "I believe in love," as a fish at a bait. But in d'Argenton's estimation women were but an obstacle and a waste of time. Their admiration was sufficient; he purposely took a higher position, into regions where he soared surrounded by an adoration to which he disdained to respond.

Ida de Barancy was indeed the first who had made an impression on him. She was, however, unaware of it, and each time that she went to see her little Jack, attracted thither oftener than was necessary and found herself face to face with d'Argenton, it was always with the same humble attitude, the same timid voice that seemed to crave his pardon.

On his side, the poet, even after his visit to the Boulevard Haussmann, continued to act a comedy of indifference. Nevertheless, this did not prevent his secretly petting and coaxing the boy, making him talk about his mother, about his home, the elegance of which had at one and the same time, by a strange admixture of vanity and amorous jealousy, fascinated and revolted him.

How often, during his lesson on literature,—what literature could interest these poor little *pays chauds*!—how often had he called Jack to his side and interrogated him :

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“How was his mother? What was she doing? What had she said?”

Jack, highly flattered, gave all the information asked for, and even more. Thus he always introduced the thought of ‘*Bon Ami*’ in these intimate conversations, a thought that haunted d’Argenton, that he strove to set aside, and which this curly-headed boy, with his coaxing voice, constantly and relentlessly emphasized.

“*Bon Ami* was so kind, so good-natured. He often came to see them, oh, very often; and when he did not come, he sent baskets of fruit, such big pears, and toys for little Jack. Jack loved him with all his heart, indeed he did!”

“And your Mamma no doubt, also loves him?” d’Argenton would say, as he wrote or pretended to write.

“Oh, yes, sir!” ingenuously replied Jack.

It is not so absolutely certain that he spoke ingenuously. The mind of a child is unfathomable. Do we ever know how much they understand of the things they tell us? In that mysterious germination of sentiments and ideas continually working within them, there are sudden outbursts that we are unprepared for, fragments of comprehension that form a whole, drawn together by links that the child unexpectedly seizes.

Was it some such connection of ideas, that had made Jack understand the anger and disappointment of his professor each time he spoke to him of *Bon Ami*? In any case he always returned to the subject. He did not like d’Argenton. To his first feelings of repulsion there was now added a sentiment of jealousy. His mother was too much occupied about this man. During his holidays or her visits, she ceaselessly questioned him about his professor, asking if he was kind to him, if he had sent her any message.

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“Nothing at all,” replied Jack.

The poet, however, never forgot to send some complimentary message to the Comtesse. He even gave him one day a copy of the *Credo of Love* for her ; but first Jack forgot it, and then, partly from giddiness, partly from cunning, he lost it.

Thus, while these two dissimilar natures were attracted towards each other by a powerful magnetic and contrary influence, the child suspicious and watchful stood between them, as though he already guessed that he would be caught, crushed and ruined in the violent and inevitable shock of their first meeting.

Every fortnight, on Thursdays, Jack had a half-holiday, and remained at his mother's for dinner, sometimes alone with her, sometimes with *Bon Ami*. On those days they went to the concert or the theatre. It was a great day for him, and for all the little *pays chauds*, for he invariably came back from these excursions into family life with his pockets full.

One Thursday, on arriving at the usual hour Jack saw a display of crystal and flowers in the dining-room, and the table laid for three. “Oh, how nice!” he said to himself as he went in, “*Bon Ami* is here.”

His mother came forward to greet him, handsome and much dressed, with sprays of white lilac in her hair, like those on the table. A large fire blazed in the drawing-room, where she carried him off laughing.

“Guess who is there?”

“Oh! I know,” said Jack, joyfully, “it is *Bon Ami*!”

For this little comedy was often acted when he arrived on Thursday.

It was d'Argenton!

More pallid, more fatally irresistible than ever, he lay back on the divan, in a dress coat, white tie and with a

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vast white shirt front, which added to his important appearance.

The enemy was within the walls! The child's disappointment was so great, that it was with difficulty he restrained his tears.

There was an awkward moment of silence.

Luckily the door opened noisily and violently, as if a horde of Huns had hurled themselves against it, and Augustin announced in a loud voice: "Dinner is on the table!"

The dinner appeared very long and melancholy to poor little Jack. He was in the way, and he felt uncomfortable. Have you ever felt that isolation which makes you long to leave, to disappear entirely, so useless and intrusive do you feel? When Jack spoke, they did not listen. As for understanding what they said, it was needless for him to attempt it.

There were hints, enigmatical phrases, such as are used in conversations intended to pass over the little brains of children. At times he saw his mother laugh, then she reddened and sipped her wine to hide her blushes.

"Oh no! no!" she would say, and then: "Who knows? Perhaps! do you think so?" all kinds of short phrases, which sounded unimportant, and yet which made them laugh a great deal. Where were those happy dinners, at which Jack, seated between his mother and *Bon Ami*, was the real king of the table, and directed according to his caprice the laughter and thoughts of his companions? Suddenly this recollection took shape in an unlucky phrase. Madame de Barancy had offered d'Argenton a pear, and he expatiated on the magnificent fruit. "They come from Tours," said Jack, innocently or not. "*Bon Ami* sent them to us."

D'Argenton, who was peeling his pear, put it down on

the plate with a gesture that showed both his annoyance at not eating a fruit he was fond of, and all the contempt he felt for his rival.

Oh, what a terrible glance the mother cast at the child! Never had she looked at him like this.

Jack dared no longer move or speak, and the evening brought no diversion from the impression of the meal.

Seated near one another by the fireside, d'Argenton and Ida talked in a low voice, in that confidential tone that is already a kind of intimacy. He related his life, his sickly and nervous childhood, shut up in an old castle buried in the mountains. He described the moats, the turrets, the long galleries through which the wind rushed and moaned; then his artistic struggles, his first attempts, the obstacles his genius continually met with, and all the low doorways to fame through which his haughty spirit would not let him bend to enter.

He spoke of the ceaseless persecutions of which he was the victim, of his literary enemies, and the terrible epigrams he fired off at them.

"Then I said these bitter words."

This time she did not interrupt him. She listened, leaning towards him, resting her head on her hand, smiling as in an ecstasy. And her thoughts were so captivated, that when he was silent, she listened still, and nothing was heard in the drawing-room but the tick-tack of the clock, and the rustling of the pages that the child listlessly turned, half asleep over the album he was looking at.

She rose suddenly, quivering all over.

"Come, Jack, my dear, call Constant that she may take you back. It is time."

"Oh, Mamma!"

He did not dare say that he usually remained later;

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he feared to worry his mother, and above all, to see in those pretty bright eyes, generally so tender, the reproving expression that had just now so dismayed him.

She rewarded his obedience by kissing him with a peculiar outburst of feeling.

“Good-night, child,” said d’Argenton, assuming an air of solemnity, and he drew the little fellow towards him as though to kiss him. The boy put up his pretty childish face.

“Good-night, sir.”

But the poet pushed him aside, as though carried away by an instinctive and repulsive movement; similar to what he felt at dinner when peeling the fine pear.

And yet he was not a present of *Bon Ami*, that child.

“I cannot, I cannot!” he muttered, and he threw himself down in a chair, wiping his forehead.

Jack, astonished, looked at his mother as though to say, “What have I done to him?”

“Go, my Jack! Take him away, Constant.”

And while Madame de Barancy, coming close to her poet, endeavoured to appease him, the child went off with a heavy heart to the Gymnase Moronval, and in the dark alley, as he thought of the professor so comfortably ensconced on the drawing-room sofa surrounded by lights and flowers, he enviously said to himself, “He is very happy, I wonder how long he will remain there?”

In d’Argenton’s cry, “I cannot!” and his repugnance to kiss little Jack, there was no doubt the emphatic affectation of his declamatory nature, but there was also in reality a true and sincere sentiment.

He was jealous of the child, just as the child was jealous of him. In his eyes there lay revealed Ida’s whole past, the living, very living proof, that others had loved her before him, and his pride suffered.

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It was not indeed that he was very much in love with the Comtesse. It may rather be said that he loved himself in her, and that seeing in her limpid and artless eyes his image reflected and embellished, he complacently paused before them with the egotistic smile of a woman to the mirror that reveals her beauty. But d'Argenton would have wished that the mirror should never be dimmed by any other breath, that it should reflect him only, instead of retaining in the shade of the past, the offending recollection of many other likenesses.

That was irremediable. Poor Ida was powerless, and could only express the regret they all utter : " Why did I not meet you sooner ? " a regret which is hardly calculated to soothe the torture of this singular retrospective jealousy, especially when it is united to an extraordinary amount of pride.

" She ought to have foreseen me," thought d'Argenton, and this was the cause of the secret anger the mere sight of the child aroused within him.

She could not however disown or abandon this dear fragment of the past with its golden locks. Nevertheless, little by little, under the influence of the poet, in order to avoid those painful meetings at which each one suffered by the constraint of the others, it became her habit to take Jack out less often, and to shorten her own visits at the Gymnase. She already began a course of sacrifices, and this one was not the least of them.

As for her house and carriage, and the luxury that surrounded her, the poor woman was ready to leave all, and even dismiss *Bon Ami* on a sign from d'Argenton.

" You will see," she would say to him, " I will help you. I shall work. I shall not be completely dependent on you either. I shall still have a little money left."

However d'Argenton hesitated yet. In spite of his

seeming exaltation, he had a cold and lucid mind, methodical and full of routine, calculating even his rashest actions.

"No, no. Let us wait a little. Some day I shall be rich, and then——"

He alluded to the old country Aunt, who gave him an allowance, and from whom he would infallibly inherit one day or another. She was so old, poor dear woman!

And they made fine plans for the future. They would settle in the country, near enough Paris to enjoy its life, far enough off to avoid its tumult. They would buy a little house, which he had mentally designed long ago, a low house with an Italian terrace covered with vines and a motto over the door: "*Parva domus, magna quies.*" —"Small house, great repose." There he would work. He would write a book, *his* Book, that *Daughter of Faust*, that book of which he had been talking for the last ten years. Then directly after the *Daughter of Faust* would come the *Passion-flowers*, a volume of poetry, and the *Cords of Brass*, pitiless satires. He had also running in his mind a crowd of empty titles, labels of ideas, backs of volumes with nothing inside.

Then the editors would come, they would be obliged to come. He would be rich, famous, perhaps even a member of the *Académie*, although that institution was mouldy and fallen below par.

"No indeed, no, that does not signify," Ida would say. "You must belong to it." Already she could fancy herself in a corner of the Institute, on the day of his admission, hidden and trembling, dressed in the quietest attire, as became the wife of a celebrated man.

Meanwhile, they continued eating the pears of *Bon Ami*, who was in truth the most accommodating and least perspicacious of *bons amis*.

D'Argenton found those confounded pears truly excellent, but he devoured them in a terribly bad temper, with much raging and gnashing of teeth, revenging himself on poor Ida by sharp and wounding phrases for all that his own conduct lacked in delicacy.

Weeks and months passed by without bringing any other change in their existence except that a certain coolness sprang up between Moronval and his professor of literature.

The mulatto, who was still waiting for the Comtesse to come to a decision about his Review, and suspected d'Argenton of being hostile to his scheme, did not scruple to say all he thought of this fine gentleman.

One Thursday morning, Jack, who seldom now went out, was mournfully gazing from the window at the fine spring sky, a sky blue and free, that awoke dreams of strolls and liberty.

The sun was already hot, the twigs of the lilac bushes tipped with green and the uncultivated earth in the little garden had upheavings of life, like a murmur of invisible fountains. The cries of children and caged birds rose from the alley. It was one of those mornings when every window is thrown open to let a little light into the houses and dispel the winter shades ; all the dark gloom with which the long nights and smoke of fires fill rooms long shut up.

Jack thought how nice it would be on such a morning to get out for a while from the Gymnase, to have some other horizon than the great wall clothed in ivy, at the foot of which the garden ended in a heap of green mouldy stones and dead leaves.

At that very moment the bell over the gate rang, and he saw his mother come in, decked out, radiant, hurried, and unusually animated.

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She had come to fetch him to go and breakfast in the Bois de Boulogne. They would not return till the evening; a real treat, such as they used to have in former days.

They had to ask Moronval's permission, but as Madame de Barancy brought the quarter's board, his permission was easily obtained.

"Oh! how jolly! how jolly!" said Jack, and while his mother was telling the mulatto that Monsieur d'Argenton had been summoned to his dying aunt in Auvergne, the child rapidly crossed the yard to dress himself.

On his way he met Mâdou, wan and sad, already busily engaged in all the details of housework, carrying about his brooms and pails without noticing that the weather was balmy and the air full of fresh budding perfumes.

When Jack saw him, a wild thought struck him, the idea of a happy child who wishes to put all around him in unison with his own happiness.

"Oh Mamma! if we took Mâdou with us."

This permission was more difficult to obtain, on account of the many functions the little King filled at the Gymnase, but Jack begged so hard, that Madame Moronval declared that she would herself undertake that day all the negro's work.

"Mâdou, Mâdou," cried the child rushing out, "quick, dress yourself; you can come with us in the carriage. We are going to breakfast in the Bois."

There was a moment of great confusion. Mâdou was bewildered. Madame Decostère looked out a borrowed tunic for the occasion. Little de Barancy jumped for joy and Madame de Barancy, like a prattling bird excited by noise, was giving Moronval endless details about

d'Argenton's journey and the hopeless condition of his aunt.

At last they started.

Jack and his mother sat in the back of the phaeton, and Mâdou on the box by the side of Augustin ; it was hardly regal, but His Majesty had seen worse days.

The beginning of the drive was lovely, along the Avenue de l'Impératrice which in the morning seems so wide, airy and park-like. They met but few people, only those who care for a little sunshine before the movement, noise, and dust of the day, children accompanied by their nurses, little ones carried in arms in the solemnity of their long white robes, others bigger, arms and legs bare, and hair hanging down their backs. Some men and women on horseback also passed by, and in the alley reserved for riders, the freshly raked sand kept the traces of these first hoof-marks, and looked, by the side of the green lawns, more a path in a private park than a public road. The same quiet, luxurious, peaceful atmosphere extended to the villas scattered in the greenery, while their pink-coloured bricks, and slated roofs blue with the bloom of the beautiful morning, stood out bathed in the fresh light.

Jack in an ecstasy of delight, kissed his mother, tugged at Mâdou's tunic :

" You are pleased, Mâdou ? "

" Oh, very pleased, massa ! "

They reached the wood, green and flowery in patches.

There were avenues in which the tops of the trees were ashy with verdure, or reddened by sap, throwing a vaporous look over the boughs all steeped in sunlight, The different kinds of trees, more or less early, showed a whole scale of verdure, from the tender green of the new buds, to the darker evergreen of the winter shrubs. The

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hollies that had borne the snow on their stiff crinkled leaves, rustled by the side of the budding lilacs still shivering and dreading further cold.

The carriage stopped at the restaurant du Pavillon, and while breakfast was getting ready Madame de Barancy went down with the children to walk round the lake.

At this matutinal hour, the afternoon crowd and all the fashionable throng with their powdered and liveried coachmen, their gaily decked horses and flashing axletrees had not yet disturbed its calm surface.

It had kept the airy freshness of night, which rose like a soft mist in the light. The swans floated by, the tall grasses were mirrored in the limpid water which shade, silence and solitude seemed to endow with the physiognomy of natural living water, full of ripples and shivers and uprising springs bursting forth on the surface in clear and sparkling bubbles. Instead of a mere motionless sheet of water that seemed but a mirror for all the latest fashions and fancies of Paris, the lake was once more a lake: wings flew across it, fins cleaved a way through its waters, the willows fringed with their tender young leaves dipped in it their trailing boughs.

What a delightful walk !

And the breakfast ! The breakfast which they ate in front of the open windows, with the keen unconscious appetite of the school-boy, heartily attacking every dish as it was placed before them ! From the beginning to the end of the repast, it was but one peal of laughter. Everything served as a pretext—a bit of bread that fell, the waiter's appearance ; and this innocent mirth chimed in with the first twitterings of the birds in the trees.

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When breakfast was over, Jack's mother proposed going to the Zoological Gardens.

"Oh what a capital idea, Mamma. Mâdou has never been there—he will be amused."

They got into the carriage, and followed the wide avenue leading to the gates. In the almost deserted garden they found the same peaceful sensation of dawn and freshness they had felt in the woods; but for the children there was a greater attraction in the crowd of animal life that filled every thicket, bounded against the palings, and watched them with tender and plaintive eyes and pink nostrils outstretched towards the delicious scent of fresh bread brought from the restaurant.

Mâdou, who till then had only been amused in order to please Jack, now began to be amused on his own account. He did not need the little blue labels, which give an appearance of numbered small prison-yards, to help him to recognize many animals from his own country. With a feeling of mingled pain and pleasure he watched the kangaroos standing erect on their hind legs so long and strong, that they have the fleetness and impetuosity of a pair of wings. It seemed as though he sympathized with their exile, that he suffered at seeing them confined in this small space, which they cleared in three bounds, dashing back into their little sheds with the precipitation of the domesticated animal that understands the necessity of a shelter.

He paused before the slight railings, painted in light colours to carry out the illusion of freedom, where the wild asses and antelopes were penned up regardless of their delicate hoofs, so nimble and so swift; and there were little corners of much worn grass, slopes of tiny hillocks so sparsely covered with turf, that suddenly some

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distant vision of a sun-burnt country rose before Mâdou in the passing by of their rapid trot.

Above all the caged birds excited his compassion. The ostriches, the cassowaries, billeted singly in the open air, with an exotic tree as an accessory in the perspective of the avenues, like an engraving in an illustrated book on natural history, they at least had room to stretch themselves, to scratch in the sun amongst the gravel of the fresh and perpetually renewed earth, that lends to this Zoological Garden the appearance of some improvised affair. But the paroquets, the macaws seemed mournful in the long cage divided into regular compartments, each one ornamented by a tiny fountain and roosting tree, divested of boughs or green leaves!

As he looked at these melancholy and dark places, for the building is rather high in proportion to the little yard, Mâdou thought of the Gymnase Moronval. In the filth of their narrow pigeon-houses the bright feathers appeared torn and dragged, telling of struggles and fights, the terrors of prisoners or mad creatures along a grating of wrought iron-work. And the birds of the desert or the wide plain, the flamingoes with their pink feathers and outstretched necks, that stream away in triangles over snatches of the blue Nile and pale sky, the long-beaked ibises that dream perched upon motionless sphinxes—upon all had settled a commonplace sameness of physiognomy, now that they appeared amid the white peacocks conceitedly displaying themselves, and the tiny Chinese ducks so delicately painted, dabbling happily about on their microscopic lake.

Little by little the garden was filling.

It had become animated and noisy, when suddenly through a couple of avenues a strange fantastic sight filled Mâdou with such ecstasy, that he remained trans-

fixed, dumb, unable to find words to express his astonishment and delight.

Above the shrubs and the iron railings, almost as tall as the big trees, two elephants of which only the enormous heads and moving trunks could at first be seen advanced, bearing on their broad backs a swaying medley of people:—women with light-coloured parasols, children in straw hats, dark and fair hair decked out with gaudy ribbons. Behind the elephants, with quite another gait stalked a giraffe, its stiff neck bearing up aloft its proud and serious little head. Some children were riding it, and this singular caravan wended its way along the winding alley, between the delicate lacework of the young branches, with laughter and little shrieks excited by being on high, by the fresh air and also by a vague fear overcome, however, by pride.

Under the rays of the warm sun, these light materials seemed rich and silky, and the colours stood out against the thick rough hide of the elephants. At last the bodies of the great beasts came altogether in sight, guided by the keeper, quietly stretching their heavy drooping trunks right and left towards the budding trees and the pockets of the bystanders, scarcely moving their long ears, which some child leaning over their backs, or a big working girl laughingly tickled with the tip of her parasol or a harmless whip.

“What is the matter, Mâdou? You are trembling all over. Are you ill?” Jack inquired of his companion.

Mâdou was really overcome by emotion; but when he heard that he too might ride on the lumbering animals, his face assumed a grave, sedate, almost solemn look.

Jack refused to accompany him.

He stayed with his mother, whom he found hardly gay enough or sufficiently full of laughter for such a happy day ; he had a craving to cling to her, to admire her, to walk in the dust of her trailing silk skirts, that she allowed to sweep by so regally. Seated together, they watched the little negro hoist himself on to the top of the elephant, with singular haste and agitation.

Once up there, he appeared at home, in the right place. It was no longer the homeless child of ridiculous manners and almost grotesque language, it was no longer the awkward mis-shapen schoolboy, the little servant humiliated by servile duties and a tyrannical master. Under his dark and usually dull skin, life suddenly seemed to circulate, his woolly hair stood out wildly, and in his eyes amid the melancholy of exile, glittered flashes of ferocious command.

Happy little King !

He was taken two or three times round the avenues. "Again, again !" he said, and on the little bridge that crosses the pond, between the paddocks of the wild asses, the kangaroos, and the agoutis, he passed and repassed, intoxicated by the heavy rapid stride of the elephant. Kérika, Dahomey, war, a great hunt, all came back to his memory. He spoke to himself, in his own language, and at that little sing-song African voice, caressing and tender, the elephant shutting his eyes for very delight, enthusiastically screamed, the zebras neighed, the startled antelopes jumped, while from the great cage of exotic birds, where the sun fell in redder rays, arose a sound of warbling, of cries, of calls, of sharp pecks, all the tumult of a virgin forest before the still hour of sleep.

But it was growing late. It was time to go back, to quit the entrancing dream. Moreover, directly the sun

disappeared the wind got up, cold and cutting as generally happens in those first spring days, when frosty nights succeed the warm rays of the sunlit days.

This wintry impression made the homeward drive mournful and numbing for the children. The carriage drove along in the direction of the Gymnase, leaving behind it the Arc-de-Triomphe still glowing in the sunset, and going towards darkness and night. On the box Mâdou sat musing by the side of the coachman; Jack, without knowing wherefore, had a heavy heart, and for a wonder Madame de Barancy was silent. Nevertheless she had something to say, something that probably was very painful to her, for she waited till the last moment to say it.

At last she took Jack's hand in hers.

"Listen, my child. I have bad news to tell you."

He at once understood that some terrible misfortune was about to befall him, and he turned with an imploring glance to his mother.

"Oh! don't tell me what you have to say."

But she continued, speaking quickly in a low voice:

"I must start for a long journey. I am obliged to leave you, but I will write to you. Above all don't cry, my darling—don't—you pain me fearfully. And I am not going away for long, we shall meet again very soon—yes, very soon, I promise you."

And she began telling him a series of preposterous stories, in which money matters, an inheritance, and all kinds of mysteries were jumbled together.

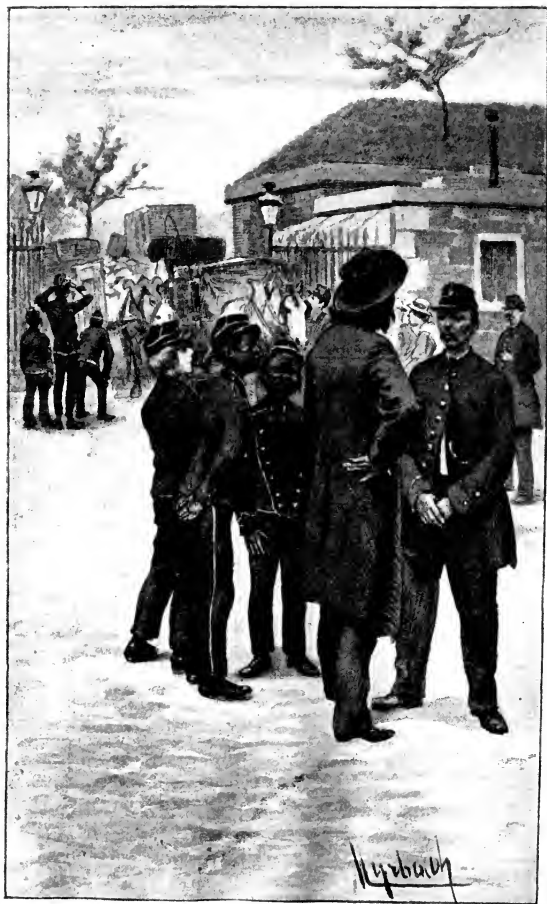
She might have talked on for ever, have invented a thousand different tales, Jack no longer listened. Crushed and overwhelmed, he silently wept in his corner, and the Paris through which they were now driving seemed to him indeed changed since the morning. Deprived of its

spring-like aspect and perfume of lilacs, it appeared lugubrious and melancholy, for he saw it through the tearful eyes of a child who has just lost his mother.



VI.

THE LITTLE KING.



To take advantage of the confusion in which the school was returning afterwards.



Soon after this hurried departure, a letter from d'Argenton arrived at the Gymnase.

The poet wrote to his "dear Director" telling him that the death of a near relative having changed

his circumstances, he begged him to accept his resignation of the professorship of literature. In a postscript and in an off-hand manner, he added that Madame de Barancy, being suddenly called away from Paris, confided little

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Jack to Moronval's paternal care. In case of the child's illness, a letter might be sent to d'Argenton's address in Paris, with instructions to forward it.

"The paternal care of Moronval!" How he must have laughed as he wrote those words! As if he did not know the mulatto, and what the child might expect at his hands, when he should learn that the mother had left, and that there was nothing more to be got out of her!

On receiving this dry curt letter, impertinent even in its brevity, Moronval was seized with a fit of mad and uncontrollable rage, such as he sometimes had, and which spread throughout the Gymnase the terror and agitation of a tropical storm.

Gone!

She had gone off with that beggarly fellow, that bow-legged swaggerer, devoid of talent, of wit, of everything.

Ah! he wished her joy! Was it not shameful at her age, for she was no longer young, to have the heart to leave that poor child, all alone in Paris, at the mercy of strangers?

While commiserating the fate of the luckless child, the mulatto had a bad puckering up of the lips, that seemed to say: "Just wait. I'll take good care of your Jack—quite a paternal care!"

What irritated him above all was not so much the disappointment of his cupidity and the withering of that last hope of fortune, his Review, but the distrust and insolent mystery in which these two beings had shrouded their movements, these creatures who had become acquainted through him, at his house, and to whom his home had served as a convenient rendezvous. He rushed to the Boulevard Haussmann for information and details; but there he met with the same mystery.

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Constant was awaiting a letter from Madame. She only knew that Madame had definitively broken off with *Bon Ami*, that the boulevard was to be abandoned and the furniture probably sold.

"Ah ! Monsieur Moronval," added the sturdy factotum, "it is a great misfortune we ever set foot in your rickety place."

The mulatto returned to the Gymnase, convinced that little Jack would be withdrawn the next term, or that he would be himself obliged to send him away in default of payment. The result was, that it became the right thing for him as indeed for all the establishment, to take their revenge for all the servility that had been displayed towards little de Barancy for over a year, now that there was no longer any reason for sparing him.

It began at the master's table, where in future Jack was to sit no longer as the equal, but as the butt and martyr of the others. No more wine, no more cakes for him.

"*L'églantine*" for him like for the rest. "*L'églantine*," blackish, sweet and muddy, as full of extraneous elements and unwholesome froth, as the waters of a flood. And all the while, malignant glances and wounding allusions were cast at him.

They affected to talk about d'Argenton before him ; holding him for a false poet, egotistic and conceited. As for his title, they knew how much to believe about that ; and the great sombre galleries, where his sickly childhood was supposed to have been spent, had never existed in an old castle buried among the mountains, but in the small inn that his aunt kept in the Rue de Fourcy, in the midst of the network of damp and crooked streets that surround the church of St. Paul. She was a good soul, an Auvergnate, and anyone might remember hearing her call out to her nephew through the dark passages, in her

country accent: "Amaury, my lad, bring me up the key of *ché bi* (*sept bis*).” And the Vicomte brought up the key of number *ché bi*.

This relentless scoffing at the poet whom he detested amused the child, but something checked his laughter and prevented his joining in the noisy mirth of the little *pays chauds*, delighted as they were to show their craven spirit at each of Moronval's jokes. Each of these burlesque revelations was followed by allusions to another person whom Jack feared to recognize, although no name was mentioned. It seemed as if some link connected in the minds of all present, Amaury d'Argenton that declamatory, foppish Failure, with another person, whom the child loved and respected above everything.

There was also a certain Duchy of Barancy, that constantly recurred in the conversations.

"Where do you locate it, that Duchy?" would cry out Labassindre—"in Touraine or in Congo?"

"It must in any case be admitted that it is very well kept," would reply Doctor Hirsch, with a wink.

"Bravo, bravo! Well said—kept."

And they would roar with laughter.

Allusions were also made to the famous Lord Peam-
bock, Major-General in the East Indian army.

"I knew him very well," said Doctor Hirsch. "He was at the head of the regiment of the thirty-six papas."

"Bravo, the thirty-six papas."

Jack hung his head, looked at his bread and his plate, not daring to cry, crushed by this irony which seemed to choke him. At times, without exactly understanding the words he heard, something more taunting in the expression of the faces, more scoffing in the laugh, would betray the insult they wished to inflict.

Then Madame Moronval would say gently:


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“Jack, my dear, just go for a moment, and see how things are getting on in the kitchen.”

And she would remonstrate in a low tone with the others.

“Pooh!” Labassindre would say, “he does not understand.”

Assuredly, he did not understand all, poor child; but his mind was awakening to his first sorrow, and wearily sought the reason of the malevolent contempt that surrounded him; and certain obscure words gathered from those conversations at meals, remained in his mind, like a doubt or a stain.

He knew that he had no father, that he bore a name that was not his, that his mother had no husband; these were the starting points for his anxious reflections.

He was becoming sensitive. One day, big Said having called him “child of a *cocotte*” instead of laughing as formerly, he jumped at the Egyptian’s throat, clutching him convulsively with his little hands at the risk of throttling him. Hearing Said’s howls, Moronval rushed to the rescue, and for the first time since he had entered the Gymnase, little de Barancy became acquainted with the lash.

From that day the spell was broken. The mulatto no longer repressed his impulsive corrections, it was such a pleasure to strike a white fellow! Now indeed, for Jack’s lot to become exactly the same as Mâdou’s, nothing was lacking but service in the kitchen. This revolution at the Gymnase did not, however, in the least ameliorate the position of the little king. On the contrary, he was more than ever the victim of disappointed ambitions. Labassindre belaboured him with kicks, Doctor Hirsch continued to pull his ears, and the “Father with the stick” made him pay dearly for the failure of his Review.

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"Never pleased, never pleased," repeated the unhappy little negro, harried by the tyrannical demands of his master. His despondency was increased by the peculiar state of home-sickness caused by the spring-tide, the agitating return of sun and heat, and especially by the visit to the Zoological Gardens, which had brought back to him the living palpitating memories of the absent native land.

The melancholy of the poor exile showed itself first by an obstinate silence—a mute resignation to the accustomed exactions and blows. But soon this was replaced by an air of resolution, and extraordinary animation. Mâdou seemed in his errands about the house and garden, in his innumerable occupations, to be intent upon a distant purpose, unknown to all, which was visible in the fixed look in his eyes, the air of readiness about his person, as though he were following some one ahead whose beckoning call he must obey.

One evening, as the little nigger was going to bed, Jack heard him softly chirping to himself in his strange tongue, and said :

"Are you singing, Mâdou?"

"No, massa, me no sing, me talk to nigger."

And he forthwith confided his plans to his friend.

He had decided to go. He had been thinking about it for a long time, and had only waited for the sunshine to put his purpose into execution. Now that the sun had returned, he was going back to Dahomey, to Kérika. If Jack would go with him, they would walk as far as Marseilles, and then they would hide away on some ship and cross the sea together. No evil could befall them, for had he not his *gri-gri*!

Jack made some objections. Notwithstanding his wretchedness, the home of Mâdou-Ghézô did not tempt

him. The great caldron of red copper filled with gory heads, kept recurring ominously to his memory. And then he would be still further from his mother.

"Good," said the negro quietly; "you stay Gymnase, me go alone."

"And when will you start?"

"To-morrow," answered the negro resolutely, and at once closed his eyes to go to sleep, as though he knew he would require all his strength the following day.

The next day was "method day" as it was called at the Gymnase. For this purpose, it was the custom to assemble the boys in the large hall where the harmonium was placed, in order to accompany the "expressive reading." As he entered, Jack caught sight of Mâdou silently polishing the big floor, and supposed he had given up his intended journey.

An hour or two had been spent by the little *pays chauds* in working and twisting their jaws over the difficulties of "word configuration," when Moronval's head appeared at the half-open door.

"Mâdou is not here?"

"No, my dear," answered Madame Moronval-Decostère. "I have sent him to market for the day's provisions."

At the word provisions all the childish faces expressed such joy, that there is no doubt they would have at once correctly given the configuration of those blessed syllables, had it been called for. They were so sparingly fed! Jack however, who was not quite so famished, at once remembered the previous evening's conversation, which, heard as he was falling asleep, had remained with him as a dream.

Monsieur Moronval went away, but returned after a few minutes:

"Well, where is Mâdou?"

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“He has not come in. I can’t understand it,” said the little woman, now herself rather anxious.

Ten, eleven o’clock struck, and still no Mâdou. The lessons had long since been ended. It was the hour when from the miserable little underground kitchen were wont to arise hot odours of cooking, terribly exciting to the already ferocious appetites of the boys. This morning there were none, neither of meat nor of vegetables—and still no Mâdou.

“Something must have happened to him,” remarked Madame Moronval, more indulgent than her ill-tempered spouse, who every now and then would go and watch at the passage-door stick in hand, for the return of the wretched negro.

At last, the twelve strokes of noon resounded from every clock in the neighbourhood, announcing the hour of breakfast which so well divides the day’s work into two equal portions. But the joyous sound had a sinister echo in the empty stomachs of the *Gymnase* inhabitants; and while all the neighbouring factories were hushed, while the lighted fires of the adjoining hovels gave forth crackling sounds of frying and appetizing odours, both masters and scholars were committed to the pangs of waiting for the food that was not forthcoming.

Fancy the famished school, with no hope of relief, lost like a raft in distress in the midst of an ocean of diners!

The little *pays chauds* with sunken features and eyes staring wide, felt the ferocity of their cannibal natures aroused under the pressure of hunger. At last, at two o’clock, Madame Moronval-Decostère, in spite of her innate distinction made up her mind to go out and buy some sausages, not daring to trust any of her little starvelings with the precious food they might devour on the way.

When she returned loaded with great loaves of bread and greasy-looking paper parcels, she was welcomed by enthusiastic hurrahs, and then only, as though the food restored the debilitated imaginations to life, each one gave vent to conjectures or fears with regard to the little King's disappearance. Moronval did not for his part believe in any accident; he had far too good reason to fear the boy's escape.

"How much money had he?" he asked.

"Fifteen francs," timidly answered his wife.

"Fifteen francs! Then there is no doubt about it. He has run away."

"It is not with fifteen francs though," rejoined the doctor, "that he can reach Dahomey."

Moronval shook his head, and went off at once to the police station.

This was an ugly business for him. He must at any cost recover the boy, he must prevent him from reaching Marseilles. The mulatto was afraid of "Massa Bonfils'" observations. Moreover, the world is so spiteful. The little King might complain of the ill-treatment to which he had been subjected, and might throw discredit on the school. He took care therefore, to note down in his declaration to the police, that Mâdou had carried away a very large sum of money, after which he added that he cared little for the loss of money, but that his heart was wrung at the thought of the numberless perils to which the dear child was exposed, poor little fallen King, an exile from his throne and country.

The tiger wiped his eyes as he spoke. The policeman tried to console him:

"Never fear, Monsieur Moronval, we shall find him."

But Monsieur Moronval remained very anxious nevertheless, and was in such a state of agitation, that instead

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of awaiting quietly at home the result of the enquiries, as the police officer had advised, he set off, escorted by all his little *pays chauds* and our friend Jack, on a private inquiry of his own.

The different gates of Paris were the objects of these long and varied excursions. The mulatto would question the custom-house officers, and give them a description of Mâdou, while the boys scanned the long roads before them, and tried to spy out amongst the empty carts and troops of soldiers the dark monkeyish silhouette of the little King.

After this, they would go to the head-quarters of the police for the official report, or to the various lock-ups where, in the early morning, all the wretched victims of vice and misery, all the dregs caught up in the night's net, were sorted and classed.

Ah! what mire does not the horrible net bring up to the surface when cast down into the swarming depths of a great city! The mire is sometimes indeed red, and when it is stirred brings up with it a mawkish smell of crime and blood.

What a singular idea it was to take children to these places, to fill their eyes with these hideous sights, to shake their nerves by the horrible sounds of tearful supplication, of howls and curses, of sobs and loathsome songs, all the infernal noise of the lock-up when it is full, and which has gained for it the melancholy and ear-piercing nickname of "*le violon*."

This was what the schoolmaster called initiating his scholars in Parisian life.

The little *pays chauds* did not take in all they saw and heard, but the impression produced upon them was a sinister one. Jack particularly, whose intelligence was more awake, more refined, would return home from these

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walks with a heavy anxious heart, scared by these glimpses of the secrets of Paris, and appalled by the thought that : " Perhaps Mâdou is there."

But he would be reassured by the hope that the negro was already far away, running with all his might on the road to Marseilles, which he fancied was as straight as an I, with the sea at the end and boats ready to start.

Every evening as he entered the dormitory, Jack felt a throb of joy as he looked at his friend's empty bed.

" He runs, he runs, the little King ! " and Jack would forget for the moment the sadness of his own lot, and the inexplicable desertion of his mother. One thing however, worried him about Mâdou's journey. The weather, so bright the day of his departure, had suddenly changed. Now rain had set in, accompanied by hail and even snow. Spring tried in vain to collect her scattered sunbeams, but hardly had the sky cleared for an instant than the ever-blowing wind brought back the showers and storms, so that the poor little *pays chauds* asleep under the glazing of their rickety shelter that groaned and tumbled at every gust of wind, could dream of long sea-voyages, and feel all the sensations of the wide ocean and of terrible dangers.

Cowering under the blankets to screen himself from the dreadful draughts that whistled and lashed through the dormitory like a scourge, Jack mentally followed the imaginary road he fancied Mâdou-Ghézô had taken. He saw him crouching at the bottom of a ditch, at the corner of a wood, amidst squalls and downpouring rain, in his little red jacket, so inefficient a protection against the inclemencies of the season. He little thought that the reality was much worse than all his suppositions.

" He is found ! " screamed Moronval one morning as he dashed into the dining-room just as the boys were

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sitting down to breakfast. "He is found. I have had a line from the police. Quick, my hat, my stick. I am going to fetch him at the lock-up."

He was in a state of pitiless indignation and cruel joy.

As much to flatter the master, as to gratify the craving for noise that distinguished them, the little *pays chauds* received the news with a formidable hurrah. Jack did not join in the triumphant howl, for he thought immediately "Ah! poor Mâdou!"

Since the previous day, Mâdou had been in the lock-up.

It was there, in that cesspool, in the midst of thieves and vagabonds, in promiscuous company with a herd of low blackguards, degraded by idleness, fatigue and drunkenness, lying pell-mell on mattresses covering the floor, it was there that the heir presumptive to the throne of Dahomey was found by his kind master.

"Ah! unhappy boy, in what a state do I find—do I find—"

The worthy Moronval, suffocated by surprise and emotion, could not finish his phrase; and on beholding him threw his long arms like hungry tentacles round the neck of the little nigger, the police inspector who accompanied him could not help thinking—

"There now, there's a master who is indeed devoted to his pupils."

On his side, however, the heartless fellow, Mâdou, appeared utterly indifferent at the sight of Moronval. His features betrayed neither joy, nor sorrow, nor surprise, nor shame, nor even the fearful terror generally inspired by the mulatto, and which existing circumstances ought, it would have seemed, to have intensified.

His eyes gazed with a vacant stare out of the dull and ashen black face. And the sordid and filthy aspect of


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his whole person, reduced to a bundle of muddy tatters emphasized the abject prostration of his condition. From head to foot, and up into his woolly hair, the mud had accumulated in thick coatings, old or fresh, overlaying one another, the driest crumbling off him in patches of dusty hue.

He looked like an amphibious animal, that had by turns dipped in the sea and rolled in the sand on the beach.

Without shoes or cap, the galoen having no doubt tempted some pilferer, he had nothing on but his now threadbare trowsers, and his ragged red waistcoat, from which nearly all the colour had disappeared, eaten out by the sun and dirt.

What had happened to him ?

He alone could have told, if he had chosen to speak.

The inspector only knew that the police, going their rounds the day before, in the quarries outside Paris, had found him lying on a limekiln, half dead from hunger and stupefied by the excessive heat of the kiln. Why was he still in Paris ? What had prevented his leaving ?

Moronval did not inquire, nor did he say one word to him during the long drive from the police station to the Gymnase.

Between the exhausted and stupefied child, thrown into a corner of the carriage like a dirty bundle, and the solemn and triumphant director, there were only looks interchanged.

But what looks !

A keen, sharp-edged steel, crossing swords with a poor little bent, half-broken blade, beaten beforehand.

When Jack saw that pitiful black figure cross the garden, shrivelled and shrunken in its rags, he had some difficulty in recognizing the little King.

Mâdou said in passing a "Good morning, massa," full of unspeakable sadness; and during the remainder of the day there was no further mention of him. The lessons and recreations took place with the habitual desultoriness. Only from time to time at intervals, the sound of dull heavy blows and deep groans could be heard issuing from the mulatto's room. Even when the sinister noise ceased, Jack in his terror fancied he still heard it; Madame Moronval also seemed quite upset by it, and the pages of the book she held trembled in her hand.

At dinner the director sat down, exhausted but radiant.

"The *misérable*!" he said to his wife and to Doctor Hirsch, "the *misérable*, what a state he has put me in!"

The fact was he looked worn out with fatigue.

At night in the dormitory, Jack found the bed next to his occupied. Poor Mâdou had indeed put his master in such a plight, that he had been obliged to go himself to bed, and had been unable to do so unaided.

Jack longed to speak to him, to hear the details of his sad, short journey; but Madame Moronval and Doctor Hirsch were there, leaning over the little fellow, whose slumber was broken by big gasps as after a hard day of overwork and tears.

"You do not then think he is ill, Monsieur Hirsch?"

"No more than I am, Madame Moronval—those fellows, you know, are as hard as iron."

When they were gone Jack took Mâdou's black hand as it lay on the blanket, dry and burning like a brick out of a furnace.

"Good night, Mâdou."

Mâdou half opened his eyes and looking at his friend with a wild despair:

"It's all over with Mâdou," he said in a low voice.

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"Mâdou lost his *gri-gri*. Never see Dahomey again. It's all over."

That was why he had not left Paris. Two hours after his flight from the Gymnase, while he was seeking in the outskirts of the suburbs a gate leading into the country, the medal he carried round his neck had vanished without his being aware of it, transferred to the pocket of one of those roving tramps for whom all is fish that comes to their net, one of those birds of prey that pounce down on anything that glitters.

Then, without a thought more of Marseilles, or the boats or his journey, certain that without his *gri-gri* he could never reach Dahomey, Mâdou had retraced his steps, and for more than a week had wandered day and night through all the Paris slums in search of his amulet. Dreading lest he should be caught and taken back to Moronval, he had led the nocturnal, creeping, startled existence peculiar to that dark class of Paris that robs and kills. He had slept in half-built houses, in waste lands, behind drain-pipes and hoardings covered by theatrical advertisements, under bridges where the wind howled.

Protected by his small stature and black complexion, he had slipped in everywhere, and everywhere found inhabitants. He had felt vice brush past him with its slimy silent bat's wings, he had eaten the bread of thieves, for thieves are sometimes charitable. He had witnessed nocturnal divisions of booty, had seen murderers revelling in the half-finished cellars, slept his childlike sleep by the side of a dreaming robber. But what did he care? He was seeking his *gri-gri*, and passed through all this infamy without seeing it.

In the foul Parisian dens, the little King had been as calm as when in the great hunts he camped out with Kérika in the vast forests, and where, awakened at night

by the screams of the elephant and the hippopotamus, he had seen under the vaguely lit up gigantic trees, monstrous shapes roaming around the bivouac, and felt the movement of the reptiles passing through the grass near him. But Paris is more terrible with its human monsters than all the African forests;—the little negro would have been indeed frightened, had he seen and understood. Luckily his *gri-gri* absorbed all his thoughts, and here, as on the distant hunting grounds, Kérika's protecting spirit was near him.

"It's all over with Mâdou!"

That evening the little King fearfully exhausted, said no more, and his friend had to go to sleep without hearing anything else.

In the middle of the night, Jack was suddenly aroused. Mâdou was laughing, singing, and glibly talking to himself in his own language. He was delirious.

In the morning Doctor Hirsch, who had been hurriedly summoned, declared that Mâdou was very ill.

"A first-class case of meningitis-encephalitis," he said rubbing his fingers, as yellow and shiny as a game of knuckle-bones. His spectacles glistened. He seemed delighted.

A terrible man this Doctor Hirsch! His head crammed with scientific gleanings, chock full of Utopian theories, too lazy and incoherent in his ideas to follow up steadily any study, he had with difficulty kept a few terms and hidden his gross ignorance under a jumble of medical terms treating of Indian, Chinese, and Chaldean medicines. He even studied the black art, and when perchance a human life was handed over to his tender mercies, he had recourse to magic charms and the mysterious and dangerous remedies of sorceresses. Madame Moronval wished to send for a real doctor to

assist this crazy piece of science, but the director, less compassionate and not caring to run into expense for which he might never be reimbursed, considered that Doctor Hirsch was quite efficient enough to take charge of this monkey, and left him entirely to his care. Desirous of having his patient all to himself without any interference, this strange doctor under pretext of a complication which might make the illness infectious, had Mâdou's bed carried to the other end of the garden, and placed in a kind of tool-house, glazed over like all the other buildings at the equestrian photographer's, in which there happened to be a chimney.

For a whole week he was able to try experiments on his little victim with all the different remedies of the most barbarous nations, and to torture him at his leisure ; the poor little fellow submitting like a sick dog. When the doctor, laden with suspicious-looking phials barely corked, filled and made up by himself, and with various strong-smelling powders, wrapped up in large parcels, entered the tool-house, and carefully closed the door after him, each one thought :

“What is he going to do to him ?”

And the little *pays chauds* for whom a doctor was always something of a magician and sorcerer, shook their heads and rolled their eyes as they watched him pass.

But they were forbidden to go near the place for fear of infection, and it became a mysterious corner at the end of the garden—a corner enveloped in gloom, mystery and terror, where an event was impending more occult and terrifying than all the doctor's drugs.

Jack, however, longed to see his friend Mâdou, to cross that closed threshold, protected by such an indefatigable vigilance. At last, by dint of watching for an opportunity, he seized a moment when the Doctor, in quest of some

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forgotten medicine, had dashed into the alley, to enter with big Saïd into the improvised infirmary.

It was one of those little rustic green-houses in which garden implements, cuttings, and delicate plants are stored. Mâdou's iron bedstead rested on the beaten ground. In a corner could be seen yellow flower-pots piled one upon the other, pieces of wire netting, and broken glass of a delicate blue colour, the atmospheric tint of blue. Faded creepers and great bundles of dead roots added to the desolate appearance; and in the chimney, as though some tropical plant frail and fearful of cold had sought shelter there, the fire sparkled, filling the green-house with a stuffy and drowsy heat.

Mâdou was not sleeping. His poor little face, worn and shrunk and wan, still wore the same expression of utter indifference. The black hands twitched under the sheet. There was something of the animal in the forlornness of his attitude, the renouncement of everything around him—the way in which he turned to the wall as if invisible roads were spreading before him between the whitewashed stones, and each crack in the old building had become a bright vista leading to a country known only to himself.

Jack went up to the bed :

“It is I, Mâdou. It is massa Jack.”

The boy looked at him vacantly without answering; he had forgotten French! Every method on earth would now have been of no avail. Little by little, nature was resuming her sway, and in the hours of delirium when one ceases to be oneself, when instinct effaces all acquired knowledge, Mâdou spoke nothing but Dahomean. Jack softly whispered a few more words, while Saïd, filled with anguish and terror, struck by the chill atmosphere that the wings of death cast around as it slowly descends

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like a bird hovering over the darkened brow of the dying, instinctively drew nearer the door. Suddenly Mâdou gave a long sigh. The two children looked at each other.

"I think he is asleep," murmured Said, very pale.

Jack also much moved, said in a low tone :

"You are right ; he is sleeping ; let us go."

And they both hurriedly left, abandoning their companion to I know not what sinister shadows that enveloped him and seemed more mysterious still in that curious place, with its indefinable green light, like twilight in the depths of a wood.

Now night has fallen over all. In the dark and silent hovel, deserted by the two children, the fire shines brightly, lighting every corner and stretching out, as though in quest of someone it cannot find. It lights up the piles of glass with a flash, plunges to the very bottom of the flower-pots, climbs up the high trelliswork lying against the walls, flickers, overruns everything in its search, and all to no avail, for it finds nothing,—still nothing. It wanders round the iron bedstead, over the little red jacket, the sleeves of which are peacefully stretched out in an attitude of rest. But it seems that there, too, nothing can be found, for the firelight continues to dance over the ceiling and the door, to roam, to quiver, till at last, exhausted and discouraged, perceiving that the fire is no longer needed, that there is now no one to warm, it sinks down into the ashes and dies out also, like the little King who had loved it so well.

Poor Mâdou ! The irony of his destiny followed him even in death, for the schoolmaster hesitated for some time whether he should bury him like a servant, or like a Royal Highness. On one hand, there was the question of economy, on the other, the advantages to be derived from a display ; and vanity carried the day. After much

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cogitation Moronval came to the conclusion that a great blow must be struck, and that, the little King not having in his lifetime yielded the rich harvest that was expected, it would be but fair to reap something from his death.

They therefore organised a pompous funeral.

All the papers published a biography of the little King of Dahomey, very short but in keeping with the shortness of his existence, and spun out by a long panegyric of the Gymnase Moronval and its director. The excellence of the method Decostère, the talent of the doctor who had attended the royal child, the salubrity of the institution—nothing was omitted. The unanimity of their praise as well as the conformity of their language was most touching.

At last, one morning in May, Paris, which notwithstanding all its numerous occupations and feverish haste always has an eye ready for any passing event, Paris saw a strange and lavishly decorated funeral procession pass along its boulevards. Four little black school-boys held the scarves of a plumed hearse. Behind them, a yellow fellow in a fez cap—our friend Said—carried on a velvet cushion some fantastic decorations supposed to be royal insignia. Then came the mulatto surrounded by the other little *pays chauds* and Jack. Then the professors, the numberless shabby friends of the establishment—all the Failures in fact—followed pell-mell. What bent shoulders, what humble countenances, marked by the rebuffs of fortune with ineffaceable wrinkles; what dimmed eyes, what denuded craniums still wreathed, however, with dreams; what threadbare coats, what trodden-down shoes, what lost hopes and unrealizable ambitions! All these piteously walked past, embarrassed by the glare of daylight, and this sinister retinue was truly



appropriate for a little dispossessed king. Were they not also, all those unhappy visionaries, pretenders to some imaginary kingdom which they were doomed never to enter?

It is only in Paris that such a funeral could be met with; a king of Dahomey followed to the grave by a set of nondescript Bohemians!

And as if to accentuate the desolation of this pitiful ceremony, a fine, cold, sharp rain fell unceasingly, as though some chilling fatality was bent on pursuing the little king into the very earth; for when the coffin had been lowered, the speech Moronval made was nothing but a tissue of hackneyed trivialities, and emphatic and icy words not of a nature to revive poor Mâdou! The mulatto spoke of the qualities and great intelligence of the deceased, said what a model king he would have been, and ended his funeral oration by the trite commonplace so habitually used on such occasions: "He was a man!" he emphatically declared.

He was a man.

For those who had known the little monkeyish figure, so piteous and so sympathetic, the childish physiognomy and language due to his brutalizing servitude, Moronval's words appeared as heart-rending as they were ridiculous.

Nevertheless, amongst all the crocodile tears shed over Mâdou, there was one real mourner, one sincere grief, that of Jack. His companion's death had greatly affected him, and the little black face that he had caught sight of in the gloomy shed, looking so utterly crushed and miserable, had relentlessly pursued him for the last two days. Added to this persistent idea was the lugubrious impression made by the funeral, and the feeling of his own wretchedness. Now that the negro was no longer there he felt all alone, abandoned to the mercy of the master's temper, the other little *pays chauds*, however

neglected they might be, having all guardians who visited them, and would have protested against any noteworthy violence. Jack was abandoned, he now realized it. His mother no longer wrote, no one at the Gymnase knew where she was. Ah! if he could have found out her whereabouts, how quickly he would have sought refuge by her side, and poured all his misery into her ear.

As they went down the long muddy avenue at the cemetery and Jack was thinking of all this, Labassindre and Doctor Hirsch who walked in front of him, were talking out loud, and Jack overheard the following words:

"I am sure she is in Paris," said Labassindre.

Jack mechanically listened.

"I saw her two days ago crossing the boulevards."

"And what about him?"

"Oh, of course they have come back together."

Her, him—this was but a vague indication; and yet Jack felt a thrill of emotion, as when he listened to the torturing conversations at table. After a minute the two names distinctly uttered told him that he was not mistaken.

His mother was therefore in Paris, in the same town as himself, and she had not been to see him!

"If I went to her," he suddenly thought.

All along the road, from Père Lachaise to the Avenue Montaigne, the idea haunted him: to escape, to take advantage of the confusion in which the school was returning home, scattered by fatigue, or chatting in groups, careless of appearances now that the effect had been produced, the exhibition ended.

Moronval, surrounded by his professors and a group of "Failures," headed the lot, and every now and then turned round with a rallying gesture: "Come on!" to big Saïd, who led the second batch. In his turn the Egyptian transmitted the call and repeated the gesture

of the master to the little fellows who wearily lagged behind : " Come on ! come on ! " Then the loiterers ran desperately and caught up with the principal group. Jack alone remained behind, shamming too great a fatigue.

" Come on ! " said Moronval.

" Come on ! come on ! " repeated the Egyptian.

On entering the Champs Elysées Saïd turned round again, moving his arms with telegraphic motions, but he as suddenly dropped them with a gesture of stupefaction and bewilderment.

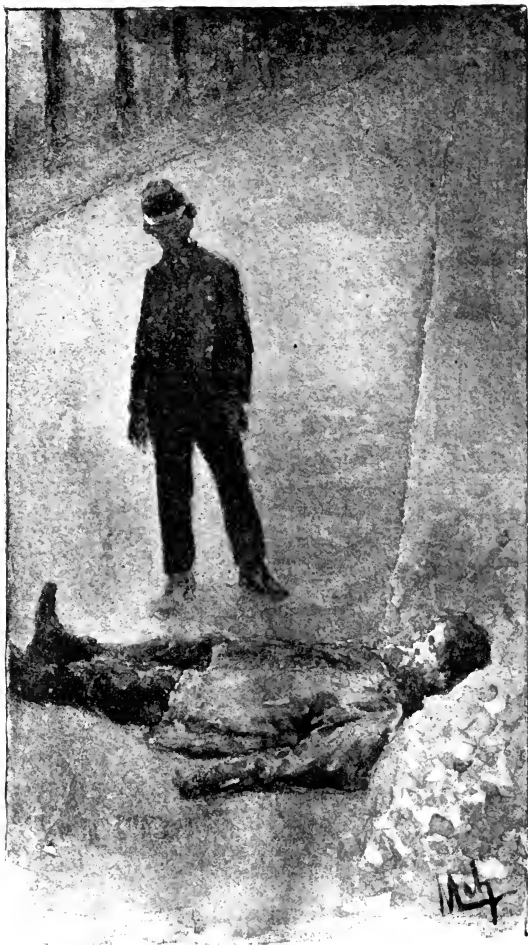
This time little Jack had disappeared.





VII.

A NIGHT'S TRAMP ACROSS COUNTRY.



A man was lying there.



AT first he did not run. He did not wish to look as if he were running away.

He walked, on the contrary, in a leisurely and indifferent manner, but he kept his eyes open, and his legs ready to start at

any moment. However, as he approached the Boulevard Haussmann, he was seized with a mad longing to run, and his little steps grew longer in spite of himself, for a terrible anxiety now increased his impatience.

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What was he going to find? Perhaps an empty house. And suppose Hirsch and Labassindre had been mistaken and his mother had not returned, what then?

The option of returning to the Gymnase after his escape did not even occur to him. If it had, the recollection of the heavy blows and lamentable groans that he had heard issuing from the room where the mulatto and Mâdou had remained shut up together on that dreadful afternoon, would have filled him with terror and made him at once discard the idea.

"She is there!" exclaimed the child with a throb of delight, as from afar he caught sight of the open windows of the house and the hall doors wide apart as when his mother was going out driving. He rushed forward to get there before the carriage started, but on reaching the hall he found the house in an extraordinary condition.

It was full of people bustling about. The doorway was crowded with furniture—arm-chairs and sofas of delicate shaded materials suitable for the softly lighted boudoir, which seemed out of place in the glare of the street. A mirror wreathed with cupids rested against the cold stones of the portico, pell-mell with baskets of faded flowers, piled up curtains and a small cut crystal chandelier. The staircase was crowded with smartly dressed ladies, and porters whose coarse nailed boots crossed the pretty dainty shoes on the thick carpet as they descended laden with furniture. Amazed, Jack went up lost in the throng, and he could hardly recognise the apartment in the terrible confusion and litter caused by the dispersion and displacement of the furniture. The visitors opened the empty drawers, tapped the carved cabinets and leather chairs, peered impertinently into every corner, and now and again, on passing the

piano, some fashionable woman would strike a few notes, without even taking off her gloves. The child thought he was dreaming, as he looked in vain for a familiar face in the mob that had invaded his home, and through which he passed unnoticed like any other stranger.

“Where could his mother be?”

He tried to make his way into the drawing-room, but it was crammed, full of people whose attention seemed rivetted to the furthest end, and Jack, too small to see anything, could only hear figures called out, and the smart raps of a hammer on a table.

“A child’s bed, gilt and quilted!”

Jack saw the little bed *Bon Ami* had given him carried past him by a couple of dirty hands. He longed to call out, “That is my bed, I won’t have it taken away.” But false shame arrested him, and he remained there, stunned and bewildered; vainly seeking his mother from room to room, amid the confusion of the apartments now thrown open on all sides, letting in the dazzling light and noise of the boulevard; when suddenly he felt some one catch hold of his arm.

“What Master Jack, is it you? Have you left school?”

It was Constant, his mother’s maid. Constant in her Sunday best, very red in the face, full of importance, and adorned with a pink ribboned cap.

“Where is mamma?” asked the child in a low voice and in a tone so full of anguish and emotion, that the big factotum’s heart was touched.

“Your mother is not here, my poor boy.”

“But where is she? What is the matter? Who are all these people?”

“They are the people come for the sale. Don’t stay here, Master Jack. Come down into the kitchen. We shall be better able to talk there.”

Downstairs there was also a large gathering ; Augustin, the Picarde, and servants of the neighbourhood were there. Champagne was being freely dispensed round the greasy table at which Jack's future had one evening been decided. The child's arrival created a sensation ; he was surrounded, petted by his former servants, who on the whole regretted a mistress so easy to please, and so indifferent about wastefulness. As he dreaded being taken back to the Gymnase, Jack was careful not to say he had run away, and spoke of an imaginary holiday, of which he had taken advantage to come and get some news of his mother.

"She is not here, Master Jack," replied Constant with a discreet air, "and I hardly know if I ought——"

Then, carried away by a sudden impulse :

"Really ! I can't help it ! We have no right to hide from the child where his mother is."

She then told little Jack that his mother was living near Paris, at a village called Etiolles. The child made her repeat several times the name Etiolles, Etiolles, to impress it on his memory.

"Is it far from here ?" he carelessly inquired.

"About twenty-four miles," replied Augustin.

The Picarde, however, who had been some time in service near Corbeil, cavilled at this statement. A long discussion followed about the best road to Etiolles, and Jack listened with the greatest attention, for he had made up his mind to start off on the long journey alone, and on foot. It appeared that the road passed through Bercy, Charenton, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, then turned to the right, leaving the road to Lyons and taking the one to Corbeil, by the side of the Seine, through the forest of Sénart to Etiolles.

"That's right," said Constant. "Madame lives just

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on the edge of the wood, in a pretty little house with some Latin words over the door."

Jack opened his ears wide, trying to remember the names, especially Bercy, the side of Paris he must start from, and the name of the place he was bound for: Etiolles. In his mind they seemed like two luminous spots between which stretched out a long, dark, uncertain road.

The distance did not alarm him: "I shall walk all night, he thought." "However short my legs are, I can easily do twenty-four miles in that time." Then he added out loud: "Well, I must be off. I must go back to the Gymnase." He had in truth something else to ask, a question that stuck in his throat. Was d'Argenton at Etiolles? Would he again find that baneful influence between his mother and himself? But he dared not ask Constant. Without knowing exactly the truth, he felt that that was the least honourable part of his mother's life, and he would not speak of it.

"Well, good-bye, Master Jack."

The women kissed him, the coachman shook him vigorously by the hand, and he passed out through the hall crowded by the last buyers, the auctioneer going off with his clerk, and the Auvergnats quarrelling as they carried away the furniture. Without pausing for a moment amid this singular confusion, while the contents of the house in which he had sought refuge were being scattered to the four quarters of the town, the solitary child, himself cast into the street by the break-up of the adventuress's household, started on the long journey which was to lead him to his sole protector.

Bercy!

Jack remembered he had gone there a short time ago with Moronval, when they were looking for Mâdou. It

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was not difficult to find, one need only reach the Seine and follow it up. It was far, however, very far! but the dread of falling into the mulatto's clutches made him get over the distance rapidly. At each moment a new fear hurried him on. Now the wide brim of Moronval's hat seemed to cast its shadow on the wall, now quick steps behind him seemed to dodge his own. The searching look of the policemen terrified him, and amid the thousand cries of the city, amid the rolling sound of the carriages, the conversations of the passers-by, all the panting breath of a great busy city, he thought he heard, "Stop him! stop him!" a thousand times re-echoed. To escape from this persecution, he went down to the bank of the river and ran with all his might along the narrow straight pavement by the side of the water.

The day was closing in. The river, swollen and yellow with the continuous rains, dashed heavily against the piers of the bridges, on which gleamed large iron rings. The wind blew, scattering the last rays of the setting sun. All was impregnated with the hurry that characterizes the end of a Parisian day, so full and busy. The women were leaving the washing-barges laden with damp linen, and all stained with the dark patches that water throws on poor flimsy materials. The fishermen were coming back with their rods and baskets, pushing through the horses returning from watering. The dredging men were waiting at the door of the little hut where they received their pay; a whole riverside population of mariners, bargemen with rounded shoulders and woollen caps, moved along the banks, and mingled with another dubious and terrible race of river-sharks, plunderers, wreckers and pirates of the Seine; men just as ready to save you for fifteen shillings as to drown you for sixpence. From time to time some of these men would turn round

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to watch the tunic of the little schoolboy scuttling by, who looked so minute an object in the grand landscape on the banks of the Seine.

At every step the aspect of the river-side changed. Here it was black, and long bending planks connected it with the enormous collier boats. Further on, the ground was slippery with fruit peel, the fresh flavour of orchards mingling with the smell of mud, and under the great half-lifted tarpaulins were numberless boats moored, and apples piled in heaps, bright in the glory and splendour of their country colours.

Suddenly the river seemed changed into a seaport, with heaps of all kinds of goods scattered about, and steamers with short and smokeless funnels. A wholesome odour of tar, coal and travel pervaded the air. Then again it narrowed; a clump of large trees bathed their ancient roots in the water, and one might have fancied Paris was sixty miles off, or three centuries behindhand. From the low banks, the town presented a peculiar physiognomy. The houses gained in height all the depth of their mirrored reflections; the passers-by, more numerous, seemed hemmed in by the horizon, and long rows of heads leaning over the parapets of the quays and bridges, and resting idly on elbows, stretched out in the distance. It might have been thought that all the idle, bored, or despairing inhabitants of Paris had assembled there to join their own speechless contemplation to the monotonous flow of the river, which, though ever changing as a dream, runs with as despairing a uniformity as the most melancholy of any of their lives. What can be the problem this living water offers, that so fascinates and tempts the discouraged and unhappy beings who thus mutely gaze at it? At times, when he stopped to take breath, Jack in his bewilderment fancied

he saw all these eyes watch and follow him, and he started off again quickly at a run.

But night was falling.

The arches under the bridges seemed darkening and turning into black abysses, and the deserted banks were lighted only by the vague glimmer that rises from even the darkest water. The houses on the quay were visible only as a jagged outline of roofs, chimneys and steeples, standing out in dull black colour in the fading light; and the shadows in the air melted into the river fog in a pale evanescent line, through which the freshly lighted street lamps and the lanterns of the passing carriages shone with the bluish tint of a fast vanishing day.

Without the child's noticing it, the towing-path gradually became higher and wider, till at last he found himself on a wide quay level with the bank, from which it was divided by a few stone posts. There by the gas-light he could see great waggons rattle under heavy portals, where numbers of barrels rolled noisily, and from the thousands of casks laid out in long rows, rose an odour of wine dregs, mingled with the sickly and mouldy smell of damp wood.

It was Bercy. At the same time it was also night.

Jack, however, did not at once perceive this.

The bustle on the brightly-lit quay, the Seine which at this place was as wide as a roadstead and reflected its lamps on the banks, thereby increasing them tenfold, deceived him as to the lateness of the hour; and then his childish imagination, excited by the agitation of his flight, was swayed by the dread of finding the gates closed. He fancied that all the outposts were already informed of his escape, and his mind was absorbed in this pre-occupation.

Once, however, that he had got through the gates of

Paris, without the custom-house officers even bestowing a glance on his little runaway tunic, and that, following Augustin's recommendation, he had left the Seine to his right, he found himself in a long street, in which the flickering lamps became more and more scarce; then indeed the cold shades of night seemed suddenly to fall upon his shoulders, and penetrate his heart with fear. So long as he had felt himself in the town, in the crowd, he had been possessed by one dread, that of being recognized and caught; now he was still fearful, but his terror was of a different nature, an unreasoning dread, the outcome of deep silence and solitude.

Nevertheless, he was not in the country. Houses lined the street on both sides, but as the child went on the buildings became more scattered, separated by long wooden palings, great building yards and long slanting open sheds. The houses, as they became more distant one from another, were also less high. Here and there the tall chimneys of some low-roofed factory stood out against the leaden sky, and in the midst of a gloomy, sinister piece of waste land towered an immense structure six stories high, of which one wall was riddled with windows, while the three others remained dark and blank. Then, as though exhausted by this last effort, a few tumble-down hovels almost level with the ground were all that the expiring town could show. The street seemed likewise to die away, the side pavements disappearing, and the two gutters rolling into one. It looked like a high road which, as it crosses a village, becomes for a few yards the main street. Although it was hardly eight o'clock, the long street, stretching far away into darkness, was silent and almost deserted. A few passers-by walked noiselessly on the muddy road full of puddles, dumb shadows hardly visible glided alongside the palings, bent

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upon mysterious errands; and from time to time the prolonged barking of dogs in the empty courtyards of the factories made the silence more appalling and the surrounding space more vast.

Jack was frightened. Every step was taking him further from the noise and lights of Paris, and deeper into darkness and silence. At this moment he reached the last hut, a little pot-house that was still lit up and sent a bar of light across the road which seemed to the child the limit of the inhabited world.

Beyond, all was dark and unknown.

For a long time he hesitated whether he should go further.

"Suppose I go in and ask my way," he thought, as he looked at the wine-shop. Unluckily he had not a farthing in his pocket. The master of the place was snoring over his counter. Round a small broken-down table, two men and a woman were drinking and talking in a low tone. At the noise the child made in pushing the half open door, they looked up. They had wan and sinister countenances very much like those Jack had seen in the lock-ups when searching for Mâdou. The woman more especially looked terrible in her red jacket.

"What does this fellow want now?" said a hoarse voice. One of the men got up, but Jack fled terrified, and in one bound cleared the luminous bar thrown out by the hut, and rushed from the volley of abuse and the slamming of the door behind him. He ran with all his might, plunging headlong into the forbidding shadows which had now become a refuge, and never stopping till long after, when he found himself in the open country. Afar, right and left the fields stretched out, meeting the horizon on all sides.

A few market-gardeners' houses new and low, like

white dice dotted about in the inky night, alone broke the monotony of the view. Yonder, Paris, still visible in the distance, was astir in all the bustle of its great city life, and shed over a whole side of the sky the red glare of its furnace light and heat. From all its suburbs Paris is to be recognised by this glow of light, as if it were enveloped, like one of the great luminaries, in the dazzling atmosphere created by its own motion.

The child stood transfixed and overwhelmed.

It was the first time that he found himself alone, out of doors, at night. Besides that, he had neither eaten nor drunk anything since morning and was suffering from thirst, a dreadful thirst. Now he saw into what a terrible adventure he had thrown himself. Perhaps he had mistaken the road, and instead of nearing that distant and longed-for village of Etiolles, he was walking away from it. And even if he were on the right track, what strength would he not need to reach the goal! Presently he thought he would lie down in one of the ditches by the side of the road and sleep there till morning; but as he approached it he heard a sound of breathing, heavy breathing just a-head of him. A man was lying there with his head resting on a heap of stones, looking like a bundle of tatters amid the whiteness of the stones.

Jack stopped petrified, his legs stiff, trembling all over, unable either to advance or retreat.

And as though still further to augment his terror, the thing began to move, to groan, to stretch itself in its sleep.

Jack recalled the murderous look of the woman in the red jacket, the horrible faces he had seen prowling along the walls; he thought that the thing sleeping there must have a face like these, and he trembled lest its eyes should open, and lest that long, loathsome body with its

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shoes struck out before it on the muddy road should suddenly rise up in front of him.

All the surrounding darkness now became peopled with these fearful phantoms. They crowded in the ditches, they stood in his way; he need only extend his hand to feel the contact of some one of them. The wretch who had fallen there, on that heap of stones, to sleep off his liquor, or his crime, might have awaked, sprung upon him, and Jack would not have had the strength to utter a cry.

A light, and voices coming along the road, suddenly roused him from his torpor. An officer hurriedly returning to his post, one of the little detached forts thrown out near Paris, was walking with his orderly who, on account of the darkness, had gone to meet him with a lantern.

"Good evening, gentlemen," said the child in a soft voice, quivering with emotion.

The soldier carrying the lantern, raised it in the direction of the voice.

"This is a dangerous hour to be travelling, my boy," said the officer. "Are you going far?"

"Oh no, sir, not very far, quite near by," answered Jack, who did not care to tell of his flight.

"Well, we can go part of the way together. I am going as far as Charenton."

What a relief it was for the child to have the escort of the two good-natured soldiers for an hour, to regulate his little steps upon theirs, to walk in the light of that kindly lantern which, driving back the dark shades of night on all sides, made them appear thicker and more awful. He learned also from them that he was on the right track, for the names of the villages they mentioned were those Augustin had spoken of.

"Here we are at home at last," said the officer, sud-

denly stopping. "Good night, my child. Another time I advise you not to risk yourself alone at this hour on the roads. The suburbs of Paris are far from safe."

And the two soldiers with their lantern turned down a little bye-street, leaving Jack once more alone at the opening of the long street of Charenton.

Here he again came across the public-houses of Bercy from which issued sounds of drunken songs and brawling which sounded still more brutal in the surrounding atmosphere of sleep. Nine o'clock struck from the clock of a church, behind which rose one above another tiers of houses and gardens. Again he found himself on the edge of a quay, and crossed a bridge which seemed to him thrown across an abyss, so black was the night. He would have liked to pause, to rest a moment against the parapet; but the dreadful songs heard a moment ago, and now dispersed through the streets, were drawing near, and the poor little fellow, hunted away by fresh terrors, began to run again in the direction of the open country, where at least his fears were more visionary.

This was no longer a suburb of Paris with fields intersected by factories. He passed by farms, stables full of the odour of manure, and the heat of the woolly sheep and the rustling of straw. Then the road widened once more, and was again bordered by interminable ditches, by heaps of stones symmetrically piled up, and by low milestones that measure out the distances for the tired traveller.

The silence lying over all, the death-like absence of motion, gives the child the impression of an all-invading sleep, and he dreads lest he should hear the heavy breathing that so terrified him before by that heap of stones. Even the light sound of his own step frightens him, and every now and then he looks hurriedly behind him. The shimmer of Paris still lights the horizon.

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Afar he hears the grinding of wheels, the jingling of bells. The child thinks he will wait, but nothing passes by, and the invisible cart with its wheels that seem to roll laboriously along, goes away to a distant point of the horizon, then returns, stops, and finally goes on in the capricious meanderings of some winding road, but never makes up its mind to appear.

Jack goes on his way. Who is that man waiting for him at the turn of the road? One man, two, three men. It is only the trees, tall poplar trees with every leaf quivering, though they are themselves motionless; elms, old French elms with their gnarled trunks and immense leafy boughs. Jack walks surrounded by nature, caught up, so to speak, in the great mystery of these spring nights in which one can almost hear the grass grow, the buds burst open, the earth split and gape to give life.

The confused sounds dismay him.

"Suppose I sing, it will give me courage."

And in the midst of the darkness a lullaby came back to him, an air of Touraine with which his mother used to send him to sleep long ago in his little room when the light was put out:

*" Mes souliers sont rouges,
Ma mie, ma mignonne ! " **

It was a pitiful sound, and shivered in the night air,—the frightened child's song on the great dark road. He used his song to guide himself, as with a sonorous and trembling thread. All at once the song stopped short.

Something awful was approaching, something blacker than the surrounding space, as though the darkness of the depths was advancing upon the child and would swallow him up.

My shoes are red,
My love, my pretty one !

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He heard it before he could either see or distinguish it. First he heard cries, inarticulate human cries, which resembled sobs or howls; then heavy blows mingled with the tumult of a tremendous shower and storm which seemed to come rushing towards him, borne along by the black cloud. Suddenly a horrible bellowing bursts forth. A drove of oxen, a whole herd of cattle wedged in between the two ditches of the road envelops little Jack, pushing and hustling him. He feels the warm breath of their nostrils in his face, the swish of their vigorous tails, the heat of their broad haunches, the strong stable odour thus tumultuously stirred up. The drove passes by like a hurricane, guarded by two thick-set dogs, and driven by enormous lads, half shepherds, half butchers, who run behind the wild and undisciplined brutes and urge them along with blows and shouts.

When they had passed, the child remains stupid with terror. He dares not take a step. These have passed, but others may come. Where is he to go? What is he to do? Cut across the fields? But he would lose his way, and the night is so dark. He bursts into tears, he falls on his knees, he would like to lie down and die. The rolling of a carriage, the light of two lamps which look friendly as he spies them afar on the road, suddenly revive his courage. Emboldened by fear, he calls out:

“Monsieur, Monsieur!”

The carriage stops, and from under the hood emerges a comfortable looking cap with ear-flaps, which bends down low to see who can have uttered this timid cry, almost rising from the ground.

“I am very tired,” said Jack, trembling; “will you let me get into your carriage for a little while?”

The big cap seems to hesitate before answering, but from the back of the hood a woman's voice comes to

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the child's rescue: "Oh, poor little fellow; let him get in."

"Where are you going?" inquires the cap.

The child looks about for an answer; like all fugitives who fear pursuit, he carefully hides his destination.

"To Villeneuve-Saint-Georges," he answers at hazard.

"Well, get in."

He gets into the carriage, and, well wrapped up in a warm rug, is seated between the fat couple who stare curiously by the light of the lanterns at the little school-boy they have picked up on the road. Where can he be going, my goodness, so late, all alone? How Jack longed to tell the truth. There is such an atmosphere of confidence in the neighbourhood of good people, but he cannot! He is too dreadfully afraid of being taken back to Moronval. So he invents a story. His mother has been taken ill in the country house where she was staying with some friends. He had only heard of it that evening, and had started off at once on foot, because he had not the patience to wait till the next day for the train. "I can understand that," said the lady, who seemed a kind though rather naïve sort of person. And the cap understands it also, only it adds some wise remarks about the imprudence of a child's wandering about the road at such an hour. The dangers are manifold,—and the cap feels so comfortable that it becomes didactic, and takes pleasure in enumerating all the perils to its young friend; after which it inquires in what part of Villeneuve his mother's friends live.

"Quite at the end of the village," answers Jack, quickly; "the last house on the right."

It is lucky that it is dark and the hood of the gig hides his blushes. Unfortunately the questioning is not over.

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The husband and wife are both very talkative and inquisitive, like those chatterboxes with whom one cannot remain for five minutes without their relating all their family concerns. They are linendrapers of the Rue des Bourdonnais, who go every Saturday to their pretty little country house to shake off the dull, stuffy dust of business life,—a sound business which will soon permit of their retiring for good and all into their green nook at Soisy-sous-Etiolles.

“Is that far from Etiolles?” anxiously inquires Jack.

“Oh no—it touches it,” replies the comfortable cap, touching up his animal with a friendly flick of the whip.

What cruel fatality!

Thus, if he had not told a lie, if he had simply said he was going to Etiolles, he might have quietly continued his journey in that easy carriage, rolling steadily on in the middle of a reassuring and moving track of light. He would only have had to allow himself to be lulled by all these comfortable sensations, only had to stretch out his little wearied legs, and to sleep wrapped up in the shawl of the kind lady, who, at every moment, asks him if he is comfortable, or if he is warm. Then the eared cap uncorked a bottle of something strong, and made him swallow a few drops to cheer him up.

Ah! if he could have summed up the courage to say: “It is not true. I told a lie. I am not going to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. I am going further, much further.—To the same place as you.” But it would be laying himself open to the scorn and suspicion of these kind open-hearted folk, and he preferred even to fall back again into the horror from which their compassion had extricated him. Nevertheless, when he heard them say they were reaching Villeneuve, the child could not repress a sob.

“Don’t cry, my little lad,” said the wife. “Your

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mamma is not perhaps so ill as you think : and it will do her good to see you."

At the last house in Villeneuve the gig stopped.

"It's there," said Jack with emotion.

The wife kissed him, the husband shook his hand as he helped him out.

"Ah! you are lucky to have reached your journey's end. We have still twelve long miles before us."

He also had those twelve long miles to get over.

It was terrible.

He went up to a gate as though he would ring.

"Well, good-night!" called out his friends.

He replied "good-night" in a voice smothered by tears, and the carriage, quitting the direction of Lyons, turned to the right and took a road lined with trees, describing with its lamps as it went along a great luminous circle in the darkness of the plain.

Then he was seized with a desperate longing to catch up that protecting glimmer, to remain near it, to run behind it. He dashed after it with a kind of frenzy, but his legs, that rest had rendered still weaker, as the light had made his eyes blinder to the accumulated shades of night, refused all service.

After a few steps, he was obliged to stop ; then he tried again to run, and ended at last, by falling to the ground and bursting into a flood of tears ; while the hospitable carriage quietly went on its way, little guessing that it left behind it such deep and utter despair.

There he lies by the roadside. The air is cold and the earth damp. No matter ! fatigue is stronger than all else. He feels himself surrounded by an infinitude of fields. The wind has the strong breath that rushes over space, land, or sea ; and little by little all the murmurs of the plain, the rustling of the trees, the flutterings of the


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leaves, are mingled in one vast roll of sounds and sighs, which enveloping the child, rocks, soothes, and hushes him to sleep.

An appalling clamour startles and awakes him. What can this be? With half opened eyes, Jack sees on an embankment a few yards off, something monstrous and terrible pass by, a roaring, yelling beast, with two enormous prominent and blood-red eyes and long black coils which shoot forth sparks as they rapidly unwind. The monster rushes through the darkness, like the flash of some great meteor, the rays of which should rend the air with an awful crash. As it dashes past, the gloom of the night is torn asunder, and a sign-post, a clump of trees, become visible; the shadows then close again, and it is only when the apparition has almost vanished, when nothing more can be seen of it but a green little flame, that the child realizes that this is a night express train.

What o'clock is it? Where is he? How long has he slept? He cannot tell, his sleep has hurt him.

He has awakened benumbed, with stiffened limbs and heavy heart. He has dreamed of Mâdou. Oh, that terrible moment, when dreams dispersed on waking recur to the mind in all their vivid poignancy! The dampness of the soil having penetrated his clothes, Jack has dreamt that he was lying yonder in the cemetery by the side of the little King. He shivers still with the cold of the grave, a dull suffocating cold. He sees Mâdou's face, he feels his icy little body touch his own. To escape from this besetting idea, he gets up; but on the road, dried and hardened by the night wind, his steps sound so loud that he fancies he is doubled, augmented by another step that follows his. Mâdou is walking there, behind him.

And he madly starts off again.

Jack goes on through the darkness and silence.

He traverses a slumbering village, passes under a square steeple that clangs out its big, heavy, vibrating strokes. Two o'clock! Another village is past, three o'clock strikes! He goes on and on. His head swims, his feet burn. Still he goes on. He fears if he stops he will be seized again by his dream, his horrible dream which the motion of walking is beginning to dispel. From time to time he meets tilted waggons apparently in a state of somnambulism, in which all sleep, both horses and driver.

The exhausted child inquires: "Am I far from Etiolles?"

A growl is the only answer he gets.

But soon another traveller will be pursuing the same track, a traveller whose setting out is heralded by the crowing of cocks and the croaking of frogs by the river side. It is the dawn, the day still lurking behind the clouds, uncertain which pathway it will take. The child guesses it is near, and shares with all Nature the anxious expectation of coming day.

Suddenly, straight before him in the direction of the village of Etiolles where he has been told his mother lives, exactly on that side of the horizon, the sky cleaves asunder and opens.

First a mere streak of light, a thin pale line stretched out on the edge of the night. Then the streak widens by degrees with a throbbing glimmer, the flicker of an uncertain flame seeking the air to aid its ascension. Jack walks on towards the light, he walks on with a kind of desperation that increases his strength tenfold. Something tells him that his mother is there, and that there also is the end of this terrible night.

Now a whole patch of the sky is bright. It looks like a great clear eye, bathed in tears, tenderly and gently

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watching the approach of the child. "I am coming, I am coming," he is tempted to say in answer to the luminous and welcome call. The road which is beginning to whiten no longer frightens him. Moreover it is a fine road without ditches or stones, over which the carriages of the wealthy must roll luxuriously. On each side, bathed in the dew and rays of dawn, splendid habitations spread out their wide stone steps, their richly adorned lawns, their winding alleys, where fleeting shadows sweep over the sand.

Between the white houses and the fruit-walls, vineyards and green slopes run down to the river, which looms out from the night, all mottled with dark blue, tender green and rose-coloured tints.

And the light in the sky grows larger and wider, ever drawing nearer.

Oh! shine quickly, maternal dawn, give a little warmth and hope and strength to the worn-out child who eagerly presses on with outstretched arms.

"Am I far from Etiolles?" inquires Jack of some navvies who pass by in silent groups, half asleep, with their tool-bags slung over their shoulders.

No, he is not far from Etiolles, he has but to follow the forest straight ahead.

The forest is all awakening. The great green curtain stretched along the road quivers. It is full of chirping, and cooing and warbling re-echoing from the hawthorn in the hedge to the venerable oak trees, in the depths. The branches rustle, bend under the flapping of wings; and while the lingering shadows are evaporating into space, and the night-birds with their silent and heavy flight return to their mysterious haunts, a lark rises from the plain, with delicate and widespread wings—rises with sonorous vibrations, tracing that first invisible line in

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which are blended, in the glorious days of summer, the holy quiet of the skies, and all the stirring sounds of earthly activity.

The child could no longer walk, he dragged himself along. An old ill-tempered hag in tatters passed by leading a goat. Again he asks :

“ Am I far from Etiolles ? ”

The hag throws him a savage look, and points to a little stony pathway which rises up steep and narrow from the edge of the forest. In spite of his fatigue, he goes on without stopping. The sun is already warm, the dawn has given way before its dazzling rays. Jack understands that he is getting near his destination. He goes on bent double, tottering, stumbling over the stones that give way under his feet ; but still he goes on.

At last, at the top, he sees a steeple standing out over a group of roofs buried in greenery. Come, another effort.

He must reach that. But his strength fails.

He sinks down, picks himself up, and again falls to the ground ; through his half-closing eyelids, he sees quite near him, a little house covered with vines and westeria in full bloom, and climbing roses that reach up to the very top of its little turret, all pink with the colour of new bricks. Above the door, between the waving shadows of the already blossoming lilacs, is an inscription in gilded letters : “ *Parva domus, magna quies.* ”

Oh ! what a pretty peaceful house all bathed in the soft light. The shutters are still closed and yet everybody is not asleep, for the fresh, joyous voice of a woman breaks forth in snatches :

“ *Mes souliers sont rouges,  
Ma mie, ma mignonne !* ”

That voice, that song. Jack thinks he is dreaming.

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But a window is thrown open and a woman appears all robed in white, in a loose morning dress, with her hair loosely coiled and with the astonished gaze of a person just awakened ;

*" Mes souliers sont rouges,
Ma mie, ma mignonne ! "*

" Mamma, mamma ! " calls out Jack, in a weak voice.

The woman surprised, stops, looks around her for a minute dazed by the rising sun, then suddenly she catches sight of the wan, muddy, draggled, expiring little fellow.

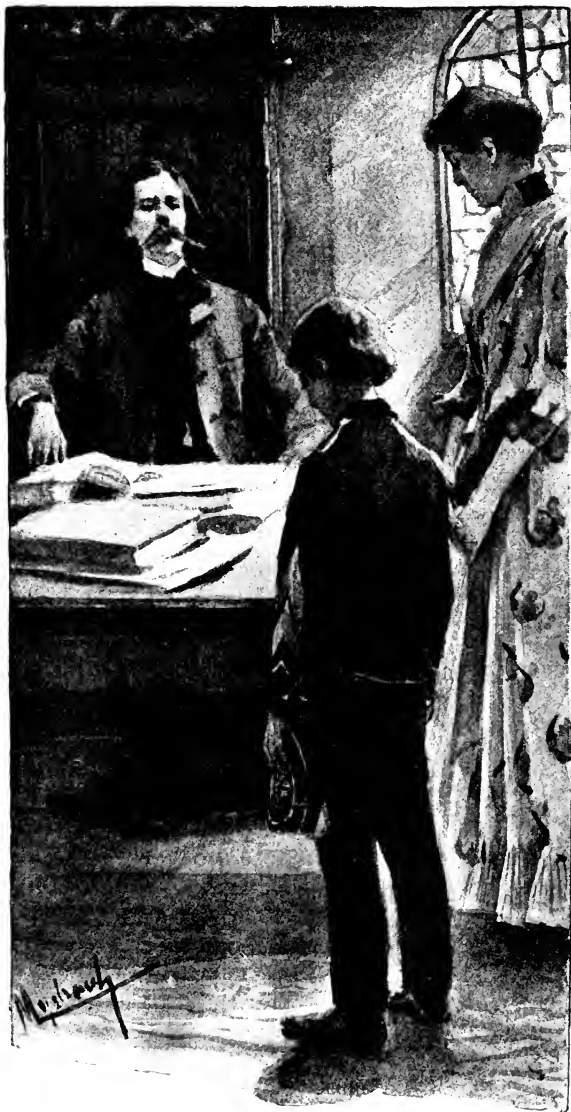
She gives a loud scream : " Jack ! "

In one moment she is by his side, and with all the warmth of her mother's heart, she revives the half-dead child, frozen with the anguish and terror, the cold and gloom of the terrible night.



VIII.

PARVA DOMUS, MAGNA QUIES.



"Jack," he said, as he concluded, "life is not a romance."



“ No, Jack, no, my darling child, don't be afraid,—you shall not return to that horrid Gymnase. What! they beat my child! They dared to beat my child! You were quite right to run away. That wretched

mulatto raise his hand to you! Is he not aware that by your birth, without mentioning your colour, it is you who would have the right to have him flogged! You ought to have said: ‘Mamma has had mulattoes as slaves.’

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Come, don't look at me like that, with such sad eyes. I tell you, you shall not go back. In the first place I won't ever have you leave me again. I shall arrange a pretty little room for you. You will see how nice it is in the country. We have all kinds of animals—chickens, rabbits, and a goat and a donkey. It is just a Noah's ark, this house. Indeed, that reminds me that I have not fed my chickens. Your coming has so upset me. Oh, when I saw you there, on the road in such a state! Come, you must rest and sleep a little. I will awake you for dinner. And now you must drink a little broth. You know that Monsieur Rivals said all you require to get well is sleep and food. It is very good, is it not, old Mother Archambauld's broth? Poor darling, when I think that while I was comfortably asleep you were wandering all alone over the country. It is dreadful. Listen: do you hear my chickens calling me? I must go to them. Sleep well."

She went off lightly on tiptoe, quite happy, still looking very pretty, although somewhat tanned by the country air, and too much got up in a fanciful rustic costume of holland trimmed with a quantity of black velvet, and a Leghorn hat with a large bunch of flowers. More childish than ever, she played at being in the country.

Jack could not sleep. A few hours' rest on his arrival, a bath, Mother Archambauld's broth, and above all the marvellous elasticity of youth, and its powers of resistance, had sufficed to do away with the effects of his fatigue. He gazed around, enjoying the comfort and peacefulness of his surroundings.

It was no longer the padded, wadded, luxurious apartment of the Boulevard Haussmann. The room he was occupying was hung in light chintz, with plain furniture painted white and grey, without any gilding. Outside

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the peaceful calm of the country, the rustle of the branches against the windows, the cooing of the pigeons on the roof, and the "chick, chick," of his mother reached him from the yard, mingled with the varied cries and sounds caused by a handful of barley.

Jack revelled in the familiarity of this slight bustle breaking through the surrounding silence. He was happy and rested. One thing only troubled him; d'Argenton's portrait hung in front of him, opposite the bed, in an affected and dictatorial attitude, his hand laid on an open book, and his hard cold eyes looking out of the frame.

The child thought. Where is he? Where does he live? How is it I have not seen him? At last, uneasy under the photographic stare that followed him like a question or a reproach, he got up and went down to his mother.

She was busily engaged in feeding her chickens, with an elegant awkwardness, gloved up to the elbows, fingers daintily spread out, and her dress slightly raised on one side displaying a striped petticoat and high-heeled boots.

Old Mother Archambauld, as she cleared the rabbit-hutches laughed at her clumsiness. Mother Archambauld was the wife of a gamekeeper, and did the housework and cooking at Les Aulnettes,* as the house Jack's mother inhabited was called in those parts, on account of a clump of small alders at the end of the garden.

"Bless him! your son is a handsome lad," said the peasant woman admiringly, on Jack's making his appearance in the yard.

"Is he not, Mother Archambauld! I had told you so."

"Yes, indeed! He is more like his mamma than his

* The Little Alders.

papa, surely. Good evening, dearie. May I kiss you?" And she rubbed her hard old skin that smelt of rabbit's food against the child's face. At the word "papa" Jack had looked up.

"Well, as you cannot sleep, I'll show you the house," said his mother, who soon tired of any one occupation. She let down her frock and took the child over the quaint little house, situated close to the village, and realizing the dream of comfort in solitude made by all poets, but which is generally only achieved by retired grocers.

The main building was formerly a hunting lodge belonging to a large *château* of the time of Louis XV., of which there are so many on that side of the country, but through the constant subdivision of property it had now become a small estate by itself. A new turret, a pigeon-house with a weather-cock, had been added to the old stone building, giving it the aspect of a natty gentlemanly habitation. They visited the stables, the sheds, the orchard—an immense orchard opening on the forest of Sénart. They ended by the turret. A winding staircase, lighted with coloured glass led to a large round room, pierced with four dormer windows, and furnished with a circular ottoman covered in some Algerian material. A few artistic curios were there, old oak chests, a Venetian mirror, antique tapestry, and a tall pulpit in carved wood of the time of Henri II. was placed as a throne in front of a large table overloaded with papers.

On all sides was a lovely view of the woods, the valleys and the river, varied at each window; in one place bounded by a drapery of green leaves, at another stretching out into the airy, luminous distance, far away over the slopes of the river.

"It is here that HE works," said his mother, pausing religiously on the threshold.

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Jack had no need to inquire who was this venerable HE.

In a low tone, as though in a sanctuary, she went on, not looking at her son :

“Just now he is travelling. He will return in a few days. I am going to write and tell him you are come ; he will be very pleased, for in spite of his severe manner, he is the best of men, and very fond of you. You must also love him, my dear Jack. Otherwise, between you two, I should be too miserable.”

As she spoke she gazed at d'Argenton's portrait hanging on the wall at the end of the room, an oil painting of which the photograph in the other room was but a reproduction. The poet's likeness was indeed to be found in every room, not to mention a Florentine bronze bust of him that was installed in the middle of a grass plot at the entrance of the orchard, and, significant detail, there was no other portrait but his in the whole establishment !

“You promise, me Jack, that you will love him ?” repeated the poor deluded creature, as she looked at the stern moustachioed portrait.

The child hung his head, and answered with an effort : “I promise.”

Then she closed the door, and they went down the stairs without a word.

It was the only cloud on that bright memorable day.

They were both so happy together, alone in the large dining-room profusely decorated with crockery, where the thick, smoking cabbage soup had the perfume of an aristocratic whim. They could hear Mother Archambauld quickly washing up in the kitchen. Around the house silence, the calm silence of country life, watched like a mysterious guardian. Jack could not cease

admiring his mother. She, too, found him grown and handsome, and strong for his eleven years of age, and they kissed one another between each mouthful, like a pair of lovers.

In the evening they had some visitors. Old Archambauld came to fetch his wife, as was his custom, for they lived far away in the midst of the forest. They made him sit down in the dining-room.

"Come, take a glass of wine, Archambauld. Drink my little boy's health. Is he not a darling? You will take him sometimes with you in the wood."

"Certainly, Madame d'Argenton."

As he raised his glass, the red and sunburnt giant, the terror of all the poachers in the neighbourhood, looked right and left with eyes that night watches among the bushes and trees had rendered so keen and quick that they could not remain steadily fixed on anything.

This name of d'Argenton given to his mother rather annoyed our friend Jack. But as he had not any very settled notions on the dignity or the duties of life, his giddy childishness soon changed his thoughts to a promise of squirrel shooting which the keeper reiterated before he left, as he called his two dogs asleep under the table, and put on his wiry curls the forester's cap worn by keepers in the service of the State.

The couple went off, and then a carriage was heard slowly and laboriously toiling over the stones of the rising ground.

"Ah! that sounds like Monsieur Rivals. I recognize the slow step of his horse. Is it you, doctor?"

"Yes, Madame d'Argenton."

It was the Etioilles doctor, who on his way home from his rounds, came to inquire about his little patient.

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"There, did I not tell you it was only fatigue? Good evening, my lad."

Jack looked at the broad red face, the small thick-set, bent man, with a long coat down to his heels, his rough white hair and rolling gait, the result of twenty years spent as a naval surgeon.

How kind and honest he seemed!

Ah! what good-hearted people, and how happy he was in the midst of these openhearted rustic folk, far from that horrible mulatto and the Gymnase Moronval.

When the doctor left they bolted the doors. The shades of night encompassed the walls with their mute guard, and the mother and child went up to their room.

Then, while Jack slept, she wrote a long letter to d'Argenton telling him of Jack's arrival, and striving to excite his sympathy in favour of the uncertain lot of that little fellow whose soft and regular breathing she heard behind the curtains near her.

She did not feel reassured until after a couple of days she received the poet's answer from Auvergne.

Although full of remonstrances and allusions to the weakness of the mother, and undisciplined character of the child, his letter was less harsh than might have been expected. On the whole, d'Argenton had thought over the great expense of Moronval's establishment, and while disapproving of Jack's running away, he admitted that it was not such a terrible catastrophe, as the school was completely ruined (of course since he had taken his departure). As for the child's future, he would take charge of it; and on his return—that is in a week's time—he would consider what steps to take.

Never did Jack in all his childhood or manhood, spend another week like those eight days, so happy, and so glorious! He had his mother, the forest, the garden, the

goat, all to himself. He could run up and down stairs ten times a day, following step by step his Ida, go where she went, join in her laughter without knowing why, be happy in fact, happy with a happiness made up of idle and insignificant details.

Then another letter came, saying he would be there the next day.

Although d'Argenton had said he was ready to receive the child, to be kind and indulgent to him, his mother was anxious, and wished to prepare the meeting. She did not therefore allow Jack to accompany her in the gig in which she went to fetch the poet at Evry station. She lectured him in an embarrassed manner, painful for both, as though they had been accomplices in some unpardonable crime; "You will remain at the end of the garden, do you understand? You must not come forward to meet him. You will wait till I call you."

How nervous Jack felt!

He spent that hour walking about the orchard, watching the little stony road till he heard the first grinding sound of the wheels.

Then he ran off and hid behind the currant bushes as he heard them go into the house, and listened to His stern unmoved voice, and to that of his mother softer even than usual saying: "Yes, dear." "No, dear."

At last the turret window opened through the foliage.

"Jack, come up! You may come now."

His poor little heart beat as he went up the stairs, as much from breathlessness as from apprehension, and even on the threshold of the room he felt ill-prepared for such a solemn interview, awed by the sallow face on the dark wood background of the pulpit, and disturbed by the constrained attitude of his mother, who dared not even stretch forth her hand to encourage his childish timidity.


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However he stammered out a "Good morning" and waited.

The lecture was short, even affectionate, the attitude of the culprit was far from displeasing to the poet, who was secretly delighted at the trick played on the "dear director."

"Jack," he said, as he concluded his speech, "you must be serious and work. Life is not a romance. I do not ask for anything better than to believe in your repentance, and if you are steady I shall certainly love you, and we can all three live happily together. Therefore, this is what I propose: Out of the time I devote to my terrible artistic struggles, I will manage to give one or two hours every day to your education and instruction. If you choose to work, I will undertake to make of you, an undisciplined and giddy child, a man like myself, thoroughly prepared for the battle of life."

"You hear, Jack?" said his mother, anxious at the child's silence. "You understand, do you not, the great sacrifice our friend is going to make for you?"

"Yes, mamma," murmured Jack.

"Wait, Charlotte," replied d'Argenton. "We must first know if my proposal suits him. It must be well understood that I use no compulsion."

"Well Jack?"

Jack, bewildered at hearing his mother called Charlotte, did not know what to answer, and tried for a long time to find something tender and eloquent enough to respond to so much generosity; but he finally buried his gratitude under a deep silence. On seeing which, his mother pushed him into the arms of the poet, who bestowed on him a cold and resounding kiss, a regular theatrical embrace, at the same time appearing to repress a feeling of repulsion.

"Ah! my dear, how noble, how generous you are!"

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murmured the poor woman, while the child, dismissed by a gesture, ran quickly down stairs to hide his emotion.

In reality the poet considered Jack's arrival as a relief. After the first pleasure of settling down, he had soon wearied of his tête-à-tête with Ida, whom he now called Charlotte, partly in memory of Goethe's heroine, and partly because he did not chose to retain anything of the former Ida de Barancy. In her society he felt alone, so thoroughly had his all-absorbing personalty imposed itself on the narrow mind and weak character of the unhappy creature.

She repeated his words, was imbued with his ideas, diluted his paradoxes with interminable twaddle ; so that the two made but one, and this unity, which may seem the ideal of happiness in some conditions of life, had become a torment to d'Argenton, too combative and argumentative a debater to be satisfied with such permanent approbation.

Now at least, he would have some one to thwart, to direct, to reprimand, for he was more schoolmaster than poet ; and it was with these varied intentions that he undertook Jack's education, with the pompous punctiliousness, and the methodical solemnity that this everlasting preacher put into his most insignificant actions.

The very next morning Jack saw on awaking, a placard stuck in the frame of his mirror, written in the poet's faultless handwriting, and on which he read, set out in big letters :

RULES.

It was a summary of life, a plan of studies, the division of a day into a quantity of little compartments, brimful of occupations : "*At six o'clock, get up.—From*

six to seven breakfast.—From seven to eight lessons.—From eight to nine ;” and so on.

Days laid out like this closely resemble latticed windows that barely allow a breath of air, or a streak of light to pass through their serried lattices. Generally, these rules are made only to be broken, but d'Argenton was captiously severe, and exacted the greatest punctuality. Add to this, a mania for systems which the former professor at the *Gymnase Moronval* had naturally imbibed.

D'Argenton's system consisted in cramming the beginner with the most miscellaneous stock of information : Latin, Greek, German, algebra, geometry, anatomy and syntax, besides all the other indispensable elements of knowledge. Then Nature was to step in and unravel, settle and arrange the jumble.

The system may have been excellent, but either it was too vast for the child's intellect, or else the professor lacked the ability necessary to put his theories in practice ; however that may be, Jack did not derive any benefit from them. He was indeed somewhat in advance for his age, and more intelligent notwithstanding his desultory education than is usual at eleven years of age. The vagueness and incoherency of his first studies became still more confused under the agglomerating system of his new teacher. Moreover he was terrified by this imposing personage, and above all, Nature disturbed and entirely absorbed him.

The child thus suddenly removed from the mouldy little courtyard of the *Gymnase Moronval*, and the dreadful passage of the *Douze Maisons* to the free, open country, was attracted and absorbed by the sight and constant touch of Nature.

When in the glorious afternoons, he found himself in

the turreted room face to face with the professor and his books, bending over his big copybook in which the lines seemed to dance before his eyes, he was seized with a desperate longing to escape, to break through some of those dreadful rules, and, exasperated in his thirst for liberty, to play truant.

Through the open windows May sent in the perfume of her flowers, the forest spread out its verdant ocean, and Jack interrupted his lesson to watch the birds in the branches, or the bushy tail of a wandering squirrel disappear through the sombre foliage of some large walnut tree. What a torture to decline "*Rosa*, the rose" in several languages, while the edge of the wood was illumined half way up by the tender fresh colouring of the wild roses.

He could think of nothing else—but to be free in the sun and open air.

"The child is an idiot," d'Argenton would exclaim, when Jack answered his questions and arguments in a dazed manner, as though he had just fallen from the top of the tree he was watching, or from the light cloud floating yonder towards the setting sun. His height,—for he was tall for his age,—added to the uncouthness of his appearance, and the poet's severity only served to confuse and still more hinder the powerless efforts of his encumbered brain.

At the end of a month d'Argenton declared that he gave it up, for he was wasting to no purpose time he was taking from far more serious and valuable work. In reality he was not sorry to get rid of the manifold duties to which these iron rules had bound and enclosed him, at the same time as the child. On her side Ida, or rather Charlotte, willingly resigned herself to the idea that Jack had a dull, and stunted intelligence, preferring

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this to the painful scenes, the rages and tears caused by this difficult education.

Above all, she loved peace and quiet, and wished everyone around her to be happy. Her ideas, narrow like her mind, never extended further than the present hour, and the future was of small importance to her in comparison with the sacrifice of her immediate tranquillity.

It can easily be fancied how happy was Jack at no longer beholding before his eyes the relentless rules: "*At six o'clock, get up.—From six to seven breakfast.—From seven to eight,*" &c. The days seemed lighter and brighter. As he understood even by his mother's manner of kissing him and her voice when she spoke before him, that he was in everybody's way, he used to run off for whole days, with the easy disregard for time so natural to children and idlers.

He had a great friend, the keeper; another well-beloved—the forest. He would start off in the early morning, reach Archambauld's little house just as his wife before starting on her day's work would be giving him his breakfast, in the little fresh and tidy room hung with a light green paper, which represented some hundreds of times the same sportsman with his gun ready, and the same rabbit scuttling away. Then they would go to the kennel, where the dogs in training with short or long noses, straight or drooping or fringed ears as the case might be, yelped and barked and jumped against the railing till let loose, when they dispersed all over the courtyard in the first transport of joy and liberty. And then what leaps and bounds, what a return to Nature, now that the straw and common platter of the kennel are left behind! Danish dogs spotted with yellow, so tractable and steady, short-legged beagles made to get rapidly over the ground of which their little squat bodies

seem to be a part; rough-coated dogs, shaking the shaggy hair from out of their eyes at every motion, and the African *sloughis* rather tall and more for show than for the chase, and the heraldic greyhounds, all sorts, were there. Solemnly, old Father Archambault would exercise his pupils, freely using the training-collar and whip, but still more his own severe eye, the glance of which had such an effect upon certain of the animals, that they would at once, subdued and beaten, crouch down before him in fear and trembling. Sometimes when he saw a refractory dog, Jack thought: 'There's one that does not understand systems,' and he longed to take it off to the forest and let it share in the bright open air, the careless happiness that filled him with a superabundance of life.

He was so happy, little Jack, so proud to accompany the keeper through the woods, to walk beside this terrible man, the terror of the countryside, who with his gun slung over his shoulder, presented so thoroughly martial an appearance. In his company the forest wore a thronged and living aspect, unknown to the profane. Instead of the startled rustling in the leaves, the stealthy noises in the grass which the lightest tread awakes, he had the peaceful sight of animals moving freely and happily about. Here a hen pheasant, escorted by her brood, picked from the ant-hills the white pearl-shaped eggs that are piled at the foot of the trees; there a roe-buck crossing the path with astonished gaze and hesitating steps, more amused than afraid, nibbled the tender young shoots as it went along. Then on the skirts of the wood, the hares, rabbits and partridges would be seen starting off for the fields.

Behind the slender curtain of young branches, among which the blossoming hawthorn showed the clusters of

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their white and fragrant bouquets, life was moving, stirring, and mingling with the shadows of the tall summits. The keeper would examine the rabbit-holes, the coveys, and destroy the vermin—vipers, magpies, squirrels, field mice and moles. He was paid so much a head or tail for these mischievous destroyers, and every six months, he carried off to Corbeil, a collection of dried and dusty remains with which he had day by day filled his bag. Ah! if he had only been able to put the heads of poachers and wood-pilferers into it! For old Archambault loved his trees even more than his beasts. A buck can be replaced, and for one pheasant killed, a thousand others are born each spring. But a tree takes so long to grow! How he watched them, to guard them against disease. Amongst others he had a whole plantation of fir-trees attacked by *bastrichs*, which made him miserable. These *bastrichs* are little worms that come in thousands, in serried ranks, pick out the finest, healthiest tree, and take it by storm. To defend itself against these terrible invasions the fir-tree only has its resin, and with all its strength it struggles to resist the enemy by flooding it with its sap, which as it flows carries away some of its life. It pours torrents of resin on the *bastrich* and the eggs laid in its fibrous bark, but only succeeds in drying itself up, worn out in the useless struggle. Sometimes the fir-tree succeeds in overcoming the enemy, but more often it withers, becomes hollow, and soon the giant who has revelled in the song of birds and the hum of bees, in the murmur of the numberless existences it has sheltered and the blasts of wind in its strong branches, assumes the aspect of a tree struck by lightning, and finally falls to the ground, leaving up yonder in the heights a wide yawning blank.

The beech-trees had a different enemy, a kind of red

weevil almost imperceptible, and so numerous that each leaf had its worm, which made a bright vermilion stain. From afar this part of the forest, coloured by a precocious autumn, a premature death, wore the deceptive aspect of health, the sickly blush of consumptive youth, and old Archambauld watched them with sad shakes of the head, like a doctor who despairs of saving his patient.

During those forest rambles, the keeper and child never spoke, the great symphony of the woods overawed them, According to the different essences of the trees it passed through, the wind changed the tone of its breath and sigh. In the pine woods it was a long deep breath like a surging sea, among the birches and the aspen trees a quivering tremor left the boughs motionless, and passed through the leaves in a thousand metallic notes, and on the edge of the pools—numerous in this part of the forest—arose gentle sounds, the rustle of leaves bending over their long lance-like stems towards each other. Above rose the harsh cry of the magpie, the sharp blows of the woodpecker, the melancholy call of the cuckoo—all the vague sounds that pervade an expanse of forest of five or six leagues. These delightful sounds ever rang in Jack's ears, and he loved them.

However, by going about all day long with the keeper, he had made a good many enemies. At the outskirts of the forest, was a whole tribe of poachers to whom Archambauld's watchfulness had made life difficult, and who hated him. Underhand and cowardly, when they met him in the woods, they greeted him with a bow in which the child had his share ; but when the latter went home alone, they shook their fists at him. There was more especially a certain old woman, Salé by name, who with her shrivelled and withered face, her old red squaw-like skin the colour of a sand-pit, her thin drawn-in lips, haunted Jack even in his dreams. When at sunset he left the

keeper to return to Les Aulnettes, he always met the thieving old hag loaded with her stolen wood, seated on the edge of a ditch, and looking like the fantastic Nicodemus who is shown to children in the moon, with his demoniacal fireproof outline crossing the luminous disc. Motionless she waited his coming, and allowed the terrified child to pass by ; then in a slow vulgar nasal voice, she would call out :

“ Hi ! you over there ! Where are you going so fast ? I’ve seen you ! Just wait a bit till I sharpen your nose with my sickle ! ”

Then she would get up and take a pleasure in frightening him, hunting him as she said, pretending to run after him with her upraised sickle. Jack heard her hurrying steps, the scratching of her faggots on the ground, and he would rush home panting and breathless. But these terrors only lent more poetry to the forest, adding to its grandeur the mysterious attraction of danger.

On returning from these expeditions Jack would find his mother in the kitchen, talking in a low tone to the keeper’s wife. A dull silence pervaded the house, rhythmically marked by the tick of the great dining-room clock. The child kissed his mother, who, making a sign with her hand, would say :

“ Hush ! don’t speak. HE is upstairs. HE is at work ! ”

Then Jack, seated in a corner, watched the cat basking in the sun, or the bust of the poet majestically lengthening out its shadow over the lawn. With the awkwardness of a child who longs for noise because he must be quiet, he would upset something, move the table, or knock the clock weights in one of the unconscious, idle movements so natural to young creatures exuberant with life.

“ Do be quiet,” repeated Charlotte, and old Mother

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Archambauld would lay the table with endless precautions, walk on the tips of her big feet that had no tips, bending her wide back, rounding her shoulders, heavy, zealous and clumsy, striving her best not to disturb "Master, who was at work."

He was working.

They could hear him up above in the turret-room, pacing up and down, marking his reverie or his *ennui* with regular steps, rolling his chair, pushing the table. He had begun his *Daughter of Faust*, and shut himself up all day before the title-page which he had chosen at haphazard, but which not a line had as yet justified. Nevertheless, he now possessed what he had always longed for—the country, solitude, and a delightful study. When he had enough of the forest, of the green reflection through the glass, he had but to slightly turn his pulpit, and could find himself in front of a varied and limitless expanse of blue water, sky and horizon. All the aroma of the woods, all the freshness of the river were wafted towards him; and the sound of the wind rustling through the trees, the rippling of the water, emphasized the great stillness of Nature, and widened his horizon. Nothing came to disturb or distract him, and the only sound above his head was that of the pigeons pattering on the roof and a *rrrouou* as soft as the puffing of their many-tinted throats.

"Ah! what a comfort it is to work here!" was the poet's exclamation.

And he would seize his pen and open the inkstand. But nothing came, not a line. The page remained white, as blank of words as his thoughts; and the chapters designated beforehand,—for the mania for title-pages pursued him—lay spread out, like numbered stakes in a field forgotten by the sower. He was too comfortable,

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He was surrounded by too much poetry, he was smothered by too much ideal and conventional welfare.

Just imagine! To inhabit a Louis XV. pavilion on the edge of a forest, near the lovely village of Etioilles, round which the memory of Madame de Pompadour clung by garlands of pink ribbon and diamond clasps; to have all that is required to be a poet, and a great poet, a lovely and adorable mistress, to whom the name of Charlotte was so well suited, a pulpit of Henry II.'s time, so favourable for thoughtful and stern meditation, a little white goat called Dalti to follow him in his strolls, and to mark the hours of those happy days an old enamelled dial, with a soft deep bell that seemed to re-echo past centuries and evoke the melancholy dreams of vanished days.

It was too much, a great deal too much; and the unhappy rhymester felt as sterile and devoid of inspiration as when, after days spent in giving lessons, he formerly shut himself up in his garret.

Oh! the long hours spent in smoking, in lounging on the divan, in looking out of the window, the terrible *ennui*.

When Charlotte's step was heard on the stairs, he would quickly sit down at the table with an absorbed, irritated look, his eyes lost in a vagueness of expression that might pass for a reverie.

"Come in," he would call out in reply to a timid knock at the door.

She would enter fresh and gay, her arms bared, her sleeves tucked up, so rustic in appearance that the powder on her face might have been the flour scattered by some operative windmill.

"I've come to see my poet," she said.

She had a certain way of pronouncing poet—*poôte*—that irritated him.

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"Well, how are you getting on? Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied? Can one ever be satisfied, in this terrible literary struggle, this perpetual strain of the mind?"

And flying into a rage, his voice would take an ironical inflection.

"That is quite true, dear. Only I wanted to know if your *Daughter of Faust*——"

"Well, what? My *Daughter of Faust*? Do you know how many years Goethe spent over his *Faust*? Eh? Ten years. And yet he lived in an artistic atmosphere, in the midst of an intellectual circle. He was not condemned as I am, to isolation of thought, the worst of all isolations, that leads to inactive contemplation and the ruin of all ideas."

The poor woman listened silently. By dint of hearing d'Argenton repeat the same phrases, she had come to understand the reproach contained in them. The poet's tone meant: "It is not you, poor fool, who can replace the surroundings so necessary to my genius, the contact of other minds that call forth the flash of wit." The fact was, he found her stupid and felt as dull with her as when he was quite alone.

Without his being aware of it, the setting in which he had met this woman, the admiration and luxury that surrounded her, the hotel Boulevard Haussmann, her servants, her carriage, and the jealousy of the other Failures at his possession of such a mistress, all this had fascinated him. Now that she was his, and his only—now that he had transformed, renamed her, she had lost half her charm. Nevertheless she was very pretty, and the country air which suited her luxuriant beauty had greatly improved her appearance. But what is the use of a pretty mistress, if no one sees her on your arm? Then she did not care for poetry, preferred the village gossip,

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had in fact none of the qualities necessary to rouse this impotent poet, to draw him from the boundless *ennui* in which solitude and idleness had plunged him.

He spent the mornings anxiously watching for the postman, waiting for the three or four papers to which he subscribed, and which he tore open with as much eagerness as though he expected to find in their columns some news concerning himself; as for instance, a criticism of the play which was still in his desk, or a review of the book he only dreamt of writing. And he read these papers without skipping a line down to the very printer's name at the end! They always furnished him with some reason for displeasure, some subject for the lengthy and hackneyed conversations at the breakfast-table.

Everyone else was lucky! Their pieces were played, and such pieces! Their books were published, and what books! Whereas nothing of his was noticed, nothing. The worst part was, that one's own subjects seemed to live in the air, that everyone breathed them in, and could make use of them, so that the first who got into print, completely put an end to the work of others. Not a week passed without one of his ideas being stolen from him.

"You know, Charlotte, yesterday at the Théâtre Français they played a new comedy by Monsieur Emile Augier. Well it is quite my *Apples of Atalanta*."

"Why, that is infamous. They have stolen your *Apples of Atalanta*! I shall certainly write to that Monsieur Laugier," poor Lolotte would indignantly exclaim.

And he would bitterly reply:

"That's what it is to be absent. Everyone takes your place." He seemed to reproach her with this, quite forgetting that the dream of his life had been to own a little nook in the country. The injustice of public

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opinion, the mercenary views of the critics, the rancour of the impotent formed the theme of his cold pedantic dissertations.

During these querulous repasts, Jack never opened his lips but remained very still, hoping to be overlooked and so avoid attracting his share of ill-tempered remarks. But by degrees, as d'Argenton's anger became more excited, his secret antipathy to the child would show itself, and the shaking of his hand when he filled the child's glass, the frowning look he cast at him, warned little Jack that his hatred was only awaiting a pretext to burst forth.



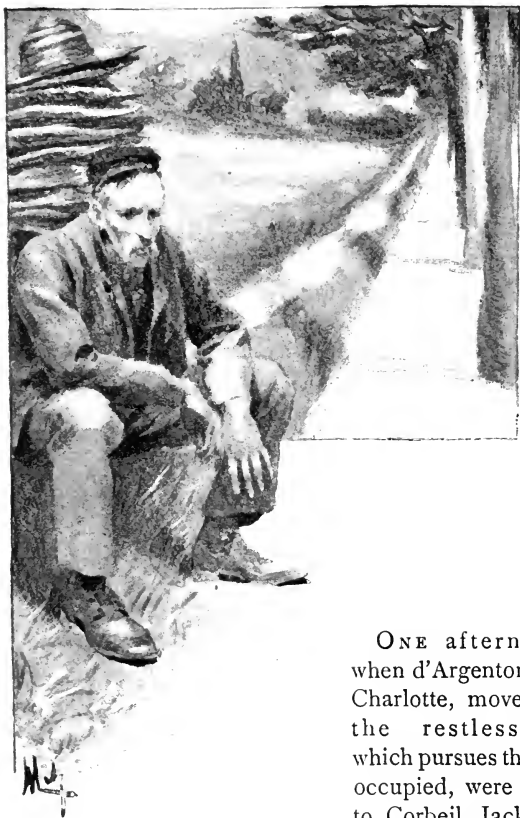
IX.

FIRST APPEARANCE OF BÉLISAIRE.



Jack watched him cut long enormous slices of bread.





ONE afternoon, when d'Argenton and Charlotte, moved by the restlessness which pursues the unoccupied, were gone to Corbeil, Jack, left alone with old Mother Archambault, was obliged to give up starting for the forest as usual, for a heavy storm was threatening. The sky, a true July sky, overcast with heavy vapours, was full of coppery lights at the edges of the great black clouds, through which ran dull rumb-

lings; and the valley, darkened wholly over one spot, silent, deserted, had the stillness of expectancy that the earth assumes at the various changes of the atmosphere.

Tired of the child's idle dawdling, which seemed to dog her footsteps, the forester's wife looked at the weather and said to Jack :

"Look here, Master Jack. It's not yet raining; there's plenty of time before the rain comes on for you to run down as far as the road and get me a little food for the rabbits."

The child, delighted to be useful, took a basket and quickly made his way down the lane of Les Aulnettes to the Corbeil road which lies below it, and set to work, seeking on the slope of the ditches the flowering wild thyme and other scented weeds that rabbits like to nibble.

The road stretched out in the distance, white with a fine and burning dust that threw dull grey tints over the thick foliage of the great elms and the edge of the wood. The road was deserted, not a vehicle nor a passer-by broke the solitude which seemed to magnify it. Jack at the bottom of the ditch, urged on by the rumblings of the approaching storm, heard all at once close by him, a voice crying in a monotonous and shrill key :

"Hats! hats! hats!" and afterwards, in a deeper note, "Panamas! panamas! panamas!"

It was one of those travelling hawkers who perambulate the country, carrying their wares on their back. This one bore upon his shoulders, like a barrel-organ, a large basket filled with coarse straw hats, piled up to a great height. He walked with difficulty and pain, his legs were bowed, his splay feet cased in great yellow shoes, and he had the suffering air of a wounded man.

Have you ever noticed how melancholy an object is a tramp on a high road?

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One knows not whither the wanderer is directing his steps, if chance will afford him a night's shelter, a barn in which to sleep. He seems to drag along with him the fatigue of the road already travelled, and the uncertainty of the distance that yet lies before him. For the peasant, this passer-by is a stranger, an adventurer; he follows him with an eye of suspicion and a glance that accompanies him to the entrance of the village; and only feels at ease again when the main road haunted by honest constables has once more regained possession of the stranger, who can be but an evil-doer of some kind.

“Hats! hats! hats!”

For whose benefit did the poor devil continue this cry? There was not a house in sight. Was it for the motionless milestones? For the birds hiding amid the foliage of the elms, anxious and fearful at the approach of the storm?

Even while he uttered his cry, he had seated himself upon a heap of stones, and was wiping his forehead on his sleeve; Jack from the other side of the road gazed at this ugly, grimy face, with sad and blinking eyes, a thick shapeless mouth half-hidden by a yellowish beard, through which gleamed the pointed teeth, set far apart like those of a wolf. But what was above all striking in this countenance, was the deep expression of suffering, the dumb plaint of those dull eyes, of that heavy mouth, of all that monstrous, unfinished-looking face, that seemed a broken relic unearthed from pre-historic times. The poor fellow was no doubt conscious of his horrible ugliness; for on seeing the child gaze at him with some uneasiness, he smiled with all the amiability he could muster. This smile made him uglier than ever, putting at the corner of his mouth and eyes, thousands of little wrinkles, all those infinitesimal lines that on the faces of

the poor, a smile conjures up, crumpling instead of relaxing the features. But he looked so good-natured as he thus laughed that Jack felt at once re-assured, and continued plucking his weeds.

Suddenly a clap of thunder near at hand shook the sky and the whole valley. A shiver ran along the road, raising the dust, and shuddering away among the trees.

The man rose, looked uneasily at the clouds, then addressing Jack, who also at the thunder-clap started up, asked whether the village was still very far off.

"About a quarter of an hour's walk from here," said the child.

"Dear, dear!" said the poor hawker, "I shall never get there before the rain. All my hats will get wet. I have taken too many, my waterproof is not big enough to cover all."

Jack was filled with pity on seeing his consternation; besides, his famous journey made him sympathize with all wanderers on the highway.

"Hi, pedlar, pedlar!" he cried to the man who was already hobbling off, hastening with all his might but without much success, for his legs were twisted like vine stocks. "If you like you can shelter your hats at our house, it is close by."

The poor wretch eagerly accepted. His summer goods were so delicate!

So they hurried off together along the road, climbing the stony path to escape the storm at their heels.

The man went as fast as he could, seemed to make prodigious efforts, walking on the sides of his shoes, and raising his feet at each step, as if the pebbles had been fire.

"You are in pain?" asked Jack.

"Oh! yes, always. It is my shoes that hurt me. You

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see my feet are too big, and I can't find shoes to fit them. It does hurt when you walk ! Ah ! if ever I am rich I will have a pair made expressly for me, to my own measure." And he went along, groaning, perspiring, hopping over the inequalities of the ascent, and from time to time mechanically uttering his melancholy cry : " Hats ! hats ! hats ! "

They arrived at Les Aulnettes. The hawker put down his pile of round hats in the hall, and would have remained there, humbly. But Jack insisted on his coming in to the dining-room.

" Come, my good man, seat yourself there. You must drink a glass of wine and eat something."

The other excused himself and wished to decline. Finally he resigned himself, and said with his friendly smile :

" Well, then, little sir, since you are so bent upon it I won't say nay. I had a crust at Draveil, and you know when one has just begun eating one can go on."

Mother Archambauld, who, in her double quality of peasant and gamekeeper's wife, had a holy horror of vagabonds, made a wry face ; but all the same she put on the table a mug of wine and a hunch of bread.

" There ! and now a slice of ham," ordered Jack in a resolute tone.

" But you know very well that master does not like to have the ham touched," grumbled Mother Archambauld. And in fact, the poet, who was very greedy, always had tit-bits put by expressly for him.

" Never mind, get it all the same," said little Jack, not sorry for once to play at being master of the house.

The good woman obeyed, but went off in a dignified manner into the kitchen by way of protest.

While expressing his thanks the man ate with a fine

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appetite. The child poured out the wine, watched him cut long, enormous slices of bread which he crammed into his mouth sideways in order to get them in.

"It's good, eh?"

"Oh! yes, very good."

Outside the storm raged and the wind beat against the windows. The man and child talked together, with the comfortable sensation that the feeling of shelter imparts. The hawker related that he was called Bélisaire and was the eldest of a numerous family. They lived in the Rue des Juifs in Paris, he and his father and three brothers and three sisters. The whole party made straw hats for summer and cloth caps for winter, and when the goods were ready, some scoured the suburbs, some the country, hawking them about for sale.

"And do you go very far?" asked Jack.

"As far as Nantes, where one of my sisters is settled. I go by Montargis, Orleans, through Touraine and Anjou."

"It must tire you very much, as it pains you so to walk."

"It does indeed. I only get a little relief at night, when I take off these wretched shoes, but even then my pleasure is spoilt by the thought that I shall have to put them on again."

"But why don't your brothers travel instead of you?"

"They are too young; and then father would never consent to part with them. It would grieve him too much. As for me, that is different."

He seemed to think it quite natural his brothers should be more cared for than himself. He added, looking sadly at his great yellow shoes, that the deformities of his compressed feet pushed into all sorts of knobs and lumps:

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“If only I could get a pair made to my measure!”

The storm without increased in violence. The rain, wind and thunder made a terrible noise. They could no longer hear themselves speak, and Bélisaire silently continued his meal, when a loud knock at the door made little Jack turn pale.

“Good gracious!” he said, “here they are!”

It was d’Argenton returning with Charlotte. They were not expected before evening, but the fear of the storm, which they had hoped to avoid, had hurried them back. They had been caught in the heavy downpour and the poet was in a horrid bad temper, tormented by the idea that he might have caught cold.

“Quick, quick, Lolotte, a fire in the dining-room.”

“Yes, dearest.”

But while they shook themselves, and the water dripped off them, and the umbrellas were unfurled wide on the stone floor in the hall, d’Argenton caught sight with stupefaction of the formidable pile of straw hats.

“What is all this?” he inquired.

Oh! if Jack could only have sunk a hundred feet under ground with his strange guest and the table all spread! But he would not have had the time, for the poet entered at once, cast his cold glance round the room and understood it all. The child stammered out a few words of excuse and explanation, but the other did not listen to him.

“Charlotte; come and look here. You did not tell me Mr. Jack had company to-day. My gentleman has a reception; he is treating his friends.”

“Oh, Jack, Jack!” said his mother reproachfully.

“Don’t scold him, Ma’am,” Bélisaire tried to put in, “it is I who——”

But d’Argenton, furious, opened the door, and show-

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ing the way out to the poor wretch with a majestic gesture :

“As for you, be good enough to hold your tongue, and be off as quick as you can, you vagabond. If not I will soon have you locked up, to teach you how to insinuate yourself into people’s houses.”

Bélisaire, accustomed in his pedlar’s trade to meet with all kinds of humiliations, made no protest, but quickly caught up his basket, gave a sad glance at the streaming windows, another, full of gratitude, to little Jack, bent sideways to make a humble, very humble bow, and preserved this stooping attitude as he crossed the threshold splashed by the pelting rain that resounded like hail upon the panamas.

Outside even, he did not think of drawing himself up erect. And they could see him going off, his back bent to all the fury of the elements, all the cruelties of fate, as with a mournful voice he mechanically uttered his cry in the midst of the downpour :

“Hats ! hats ! hats ! ”

There was a moment’s silence in the dining-room, while the gamekeeper’s wife was making a fire of vine twigs blaze in the large wide open hearth, and Charlotte tried to dry the poet’s garments while he walked up and down in his shirt sleeves, dignified and solemn, a prey to the deepest anger.

Suddenly, in passing the table, he saw the ham, his ham, in which the hawker’s knife, guided by a fierce appetite, had made deep digs, holes yawning as wide as the caves that the sea hollows out at high tides, and of which the furthest ends are never reached.

He turned livid.

Remember that this ham was sacred, as was the poet’s wine, his mustard pot, his mineral water !


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“ Oh ! oh ! I had not noticed this ! it has been a perfect feast then. What ! the ham even ? ”

“ They have touched the ham ? ” asked Charlotte, drawing herself up indignant and amazed at such audacity.

The keeper's wife added :

“ Ah indeed, I did say that master would scold at giving such a fine piece of pig to that vagrant. But he knows no better yet, does he ? He is so young ! ”

Jack, no longer in the flush of his charitable impulse, nor under the charm of that wrinkled smile,—and what a kindly, touching smile it was,—Jack was thunderstruck at his own daring. Trembling and agitated he stammered out :

“ Forgive me.”

“ Ah yes, indeed ! forgive ! ”

Wounded in his pride and in his greediness, d'Argenton gave full vent to all the feelings of irritation, nervous dislike, and absolute hatred that he nourished against the child, living token and accusing proof of the mysterious past of the woman whom he loved a little, but respected not at all.

He had—rare thing with him—a fit of rage, seized Jack by the arm, shook the long youthful body lifting him off his feet to show him his weakness :

“ How did you dare to touch that ham ? What right had you ? You knew well enough it was not yours. To begin with, nothing here is yours. The bed you sleep in, the bread you eat, it is to my kindness and generosity that you owe them. And in truth, I am wrong to be so charitable. For after all, what do I know about you ? Who are you ? Where do you come from ? There are moments when the precocious depravity of your instincts gives me strange ideas as to your origin.”

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An imploring sign from Charlotte stopped him, and drew his attention to the black, questioning, listening eyes of Mother Archambault, who was staring at them. In the neighbourhood, they were believed to be married; Jack passed for Madame d'Argenton's child by a former husband.

Compelled to stop and hold back the stream of invective that nearly choked him, d'Argenton exasperated and grotesque, dripping and steaming like an omnibus horse, went rapidly up to his room, banging the door. Jack, dismayed, remained rooted to the spot in presence of his mother's despair, who wrung her lovely hands again asking Providence what she had done to deserve such an existence? It was her only resource in all the complications of life. As always, the question remained unanswered, but it would certainly appear that she must have committed some very egregious faults since the Almighty had condemned her to become and remain the blindly obtuse and attached companion of such a wretch.

To put the finishing touch to the poet's already gloomy state of temper, illness was added to the dulness and weariness of solitude. Like all those who have had to rough it for long, d'Argenton had a weak digestion, besides this, being very nervous about himself and very complaining, he listened to his heart beating,—as the common saying is—and in the perfect stillness of Les Aulnettes nothing was easier. What an excellent pretext also, to explain the sterility of his brain, the long naps on the divan, the apathy that overpowered him. Henceforward the famous : "He is at work, Monsieur is at work," was replaced by : "Monsieur is suffering from his nerves." He christened by these vague words an intermittent discomfort that did not, however, prevent him from going to

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the bread-basket several times a day, cutting himself great hunches of fresh bread that he covered thickly with cream cheese, and devoured in huge mouthfuls. Putting this aside, he had all the appearance of an invalid: the languid step, the bad humour, the perpetual exigencies.

Kind Charlotte pitied him, tended him, petted him. The sister of charity who lives in the heart of every woman, was in her, mixed with a sort of idiotic sentimentality which made her poet all the dearer to her, since she believed him to be ill. And what ingenuity she exerted to solace and amuse him. Now it was a woollen cover laid under the table-cloth to deaden the rattle of the plates and the knives, or an arrangement of cushions with which she lined the straight back of the Henri II. pulpit; then all sorts of delicate attentions, flannel, herb tea, all those gentle soothing surroundings in which willing invalids lull their energies to sleep, weakening even the sound of their voices. It must be owned that the poor woman, with that ever springing gaiety that could not be repressed, would sometimes annihilate at one blow all her virtues as a sick nurse, and return to her exuberance of speech and gesture, only stopping, a little confused, at the sight of the poet's irritation and his plaintive tone: "Be quiet; you tire me."

This illness of d'Argenton's attracted to the house a constant visitor, Doctor Rivals, who was watched for at every turn of the road; for his large practice, scattered over thirty miles of country, monopolized the whole of his time. He would come in with his kindly and cheery, red face, his silky white hair and the pockets of his long coat stuffed with old books that he always read by the way, whether on foot or in his carriage. Charlotte would assume an important air as she greeted him in the passage:

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"Oh! doctor do make haste. If you knew what a state our poet is in."

"Pooh, don't worry yourself, he only needs amusement." The fact was that d'Argenton, who greeted the doctor in a feeble and doleful voice, was so delighted to see a fresh face, to find a new element introduced into the monotony of his existence, that he forgot his ills, talked of politics and literature, dazzling the good doctor with accounts of life in Paris, the persons he pretended to know and to whom he had said some cutting word. The doctor, both simple and frank, had no reason to mistrust this frigid voice which even in its excess of extravagant vanity seemed to measure all its phrases; moreover old Rivals was no observer.

He took pleasure in the household, thought the poet original and intelligent, the woman pretty, the child delightful, and did not feel as a more finely organized nature might have done, by what chance links these beings held together, by what pricking and badly fastened pins they had succeeded in fitting themselves to each other as a family.

How often, towards the middle of the day, his horse fastened to the ring of the fence, the good man lingered at the house of the 'Parisians', sipping the grog that Charlotte herself mixed for him, and relating his voyages to India and China on board the *Bayonnaise*. Jack remained in a corner, attentive and silent, devoured by the passion for adventure that all children have within them, and that alas! life so soon comes to lay low, with its monotonous levelling and its gradual drawing closer of human horizons. "Jack," d'Argenton would say brutally, pointing to the door. But the doctor interposed:

"Let him be. It is so pleasant to have the little ones

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around us. They are very sharp, these little creatures. I am quite sure yours has guessed, merely from seeing me that I am devoted to children and that I am a grandpapa."

Then he spoke of his grand-daughter Cécile, who was two years younger than Jack, and when he was started on the perfections of Cécile, he was even more garrulous than when relating his voyages.

"Why do you not bring her, doctor?" said Charlotte. They would play together so nicely, those two."

"Oh! no Madame. Her grandmother would not allow it. She never trusts the child to anyone, and she herself goes nowhere since our misfortune."

This misfortune, often alluded to by Rivals, was the loss of his daughter and her husband, both dead the very year of their marriage, shortly after the birth of Cécile. A mystery surrounded this double catastrophe. With the d'Argentons, the doctor's confidences, were always limited to these words: "Since our misfortune..." and Mother Archambauld, who was acquainted with the story, spoke of it only in the vaguest terms:

"Ah, indeed! yes indeed! they are people who've had sad trouble."

Nothing of it appeared in the gaiety and animation of the doctor when he came to Les Aulnettes. Perhaps Charlotte's grog had something to do with it, a loaded, stiff grog, that Madame Rivals, if she had seen it, would have hastened to dilute with a great deal of water. However, it may be, the goodman was by no means bored at the Parisians, and many a time would rise, saying: "I am going to Ris, to Tigery, or to Morsang," and continue the conversation already begun till the moment when the pawing of his horse, growing impatient at the door, made him hurry away, throwing a good-day to the poet and to

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Charlotte, wholly occupied with her invalid, a prescription that was always the same: "Keep him amused."

"Amused."

She no longer knew what to do nor invent to amuse him. They spent hours in ordering their meals, or else set off for the forest in their pony-trap, taking with them their breakfast, a butterfly net and large bundles of daily papers or books. He remained bored.

He bought a boat, but this was even worse, the tête-à-tête in the middle of the Seine being obligatory and absolute and for that reason insupportable to the pair who never exchanged a word, but threw in their lines by way of occupation, and in order to find in the silence necessary for fishing, an excuse for their perpetual muteness. Soon, however, the boat was left moored among the reeds of the river side, and filled with water and fallen leaves.

After this he was seized with all kinds of extraordinary fancies, alterations to be made in the walls, in the turret, the construction of an exterior staircase, and an Italian terrace that the poet had always dreamed of; a row of low pillars draped with greenery, garlanded with Virginian creeper. But he still was bored, notwithstanding his terrace.

One day, when a tuner had come to put in order the old piano on which the poet strummed a few polkas, this man, who had a turn for strange inventions, proposed to him to place upon the roof an Eolian harp, a great box without a lid, five feet high, in which strings of unequal length were stretched and vibrated in the wind with plaintive and harmonious chords. D'Argenton accepted the idea with enthusiasm. When the apparatus was in place, the effect was weird in the extreme. At the slightest breath of wind, moanings were heard, heart-

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rending modulations, lamentable cries and shrieks, *hououou*. Jack, lying in his bed, was terrified, and hid his head beneath the clothes that he might hear no more. There fell from aloft such a fearful melancholy, fit to drive anyone mad.

"That harp bores me to death ! Enough ; stop it," cried the exasperated poet.

The whole mechanism had to be taken down, the Eolian harp carried to the further end of the garden, and buried to prevent it from vibrating. But even below ground it still sounded. Then at last they broke the strings and smashed it with kicks and stones as if it were a furious animal that would not die.

Not knowing what to invent to amuse the unlucky fellow, whose want of occupation was turning to mania, Charlotte had a generous idea : "Suppose I invite some of his friends."

This was a real sacrifice, for she would have liked to keep him to herself, herself alone ; but the poet's joy when she told him that Labassindre and Doctor Hirsch were coming to see him rewarded her for her courage. For a long time past his thoughts had dwelt on some diversion from the outer world, yet he dared not speak of it after all his declamations on the happiness of solitude and of life with one chosen companion.

Some time after this, Jack, returning for dinner, heard as he approached the house, an unaccustomed bustle and laughter and the clink of glasses proceeding from the new terrace, while a noise of saucepans and breaking of wood arose from the great kitchen on the ground floor. As he drew nearer he recognized the voices and the peculiarities of the former professors of the Gymnase, and, mingled with these, the voice of d'Argenton no longer dull and whining as usual, but brightened up by

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the friction of discussion. An impression of terror fell upon the child at the idea of finding himself face to face with these creatures who recalled to him so many unhappy hours, and it was in trembling that he stole into the garden to await the dinner.

"Gentlemen, dinner is ready when you are," said Charlotte, appearing on the terrace fresh and animated wearing a great white apron with a bib reaching up to her chin, in the get up of a housewife who can, when needful, turn up her lace ruffles and lend a hand to the pastry making.

All quickly went down to the dining-room where the two professors greeted little Jack with tolerable cordiality; and every one took his seat for one of those excellent meals, which, in the haste of their cooking, seem to retain the flavour of wild herbs and all the savour of the stock-pot.

Through the two windows, opened wide upon the lawn, the garden was visible, the wood beyond seeming to be a mere extension of it. The call of the partridge, the twittering of birds going to roost reached the ears of the guests and entered the room at the same time as the last oblique and flaming rays of the setting sun upon the window panes.

"By Jove, my good friends, you have a nice place here!" said Labassindre suddenly, when the soup having been swallowed with much zest, they were again free to think.

"Well, we really are very happy," replied d'Argenton, pressing Charlotte's hand, and, finding her incredibly prettier and more fascinating now that he was not alone to contemplate her; and he began to give an account of their happiness.

He described their excursions in the forest, the boating expeditions, the halts at old riverside inns, old towing


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stage houses with an interior balustrade in wrought iron, and the two great rusty tow rings fixed in the stone-work of the facade. And the long afternoons of work in the vast silences of summer, and the evenings by the chimney corner in the autumn, when it begins to be chilly, and the flame sparkles and leaps high fed by dry roots and stumps.

He spoke as he felt at the moment, and she, too, imagined she had lived this ideal life during the time of mortal dulness they had so wearily traversed. The two others listened with an inexpressible grimace of admiration, envy and pleasure, something at once bitter and wan in their smile, for the eyes full of affability, contradicted the mouth, twisted by convulsive spite.

"Ah, you have been lucky, you have," said Labassindre; "and to think that to-morrow at this hour, while you are dining here, I shall be seated in some stuffy eating-house where the very air you breathe, the windows covered with steam, the portion of food they bring you,—all smells of heat, steam, and stew."

"Lucky even if one is sure of dining regularly at the eating-house," grumbled Doctor Hirsch.

D'Argenton was moved by a sudden impulse.

"Well, what prevents you from staying with us for a while? The house is large, the cellars well filled."

"To be sure," said Charlotte eagerly, "do stay, it will be charming. We will make excursions."

"And the opera?" said Labassindre, who rehearsed every day.

"But you, Monsieur Hirsch, you do not play at the opera."

"By Jove, Comtesse, I am much tempted to accept your invitation. I have very little to do at this moment, since all my patients are in the country."

The patients of Doctor Hirsch gone into the country ! It was really extremely droll. But no one felt inclined to laugh ; among Failures, they were accustomed to many strange freaks of imagination.

"Come, make up your mind," said d'Argenton. "In the first place, you would be doing me a service. In my present state of health, you might give me some advice."

"That settles the matter. You know what I said to you ; Rivals knows nothing about your case. In a month I undertake to set you on your legs again."

"Well, and how about the Gymnase ? and Moronval ?" cried Labassindre, furious at seeing the other have an enjoyment he could not share.

"Oh, bother ! I have had enough of the Gymnase and Moronval, and the Decostère method."

Thereupon, Doctor Hirsch, being certain of board and lodging for some time to come, launched forth into complaints and imprecations against the institution which really kept him alive. Moronval was a mere jobber ; he had not a penny left, he never paid up. Besides every one was leaving him. Mâdou's affair had greatly damaged him.

The others took up the theme, and the Moronvals were torn to pieces in the most blood-thirsty style. They even went so far as to compliment Jack on his escapade which had, it appeared, put the mulatto into such a state of bilious rage that it had brought on jaundice.

Once started on this subject, familiar to them all, the three friends went on unceasingly, and the whole evening was spent in "breaking sugar," as they said in their slang.

Labassindre broke it on the heads of the chief singers at the Opera, mere braggart strolling players without voice or talent. He broke it again on the head of his manager who purposely kept him wasting his time in

second-rate parts. And why? Because his socialist opinions were known, because it was known that he had been a workman, that he sprang from the people and loved them.

"Well, yes! I love the people," said the singer growing warm and thumping his big fists on the table. "And what of that? What difference can it make to them? Does it prevent my having my deep note? And I think it is there, eh? Just listen to that, you fellows." And he tried his note, dwelt upon it, rolled it in his throat in an ecstasy of delight.

Then it was d'Argenton's turn. He broke his sugar methodically and coldly, with dry and pitiless little blows. The managers of theatres, authors, publishers, the public, all had their share; and while Charlotte, aided by little Jack, was superintending the preparation of the coffee, all three remained elbows on table, in face of the lovely summer evening, voluptuously slaving gossip, like boas, by way of helping digestion.

The arrival of Doctor Rivals completed the animation of the meeting. Charmed to find a numerous and merry party, the worthy man sat down at the table.

"You see after all, Madame d'Argenton, that our invalid needed nothing but amusement."

Doctor Hirsch's eyes flashed behind his convex spectacles.

"I am not of your opinion, doctor," said he, very decidedly, leaning his chin on his hand, ready for the battle.

It was not without astonishment that old Rivals looked at this singular personage—filthy, bald-headed, chin shaven, a white cravat round his neck, who, having only one tiny corner of the left eye of any use, was obliged in order to dart a visual ray upon his interlocutor to set himself sideways and speak in profile.

"You are a doctor, sir?" asked he.

D'Argenton saved his friend the trouble of lying.

"Doctor Hirsch, Doctor Rivals," said he, introducing them to each other.

They bowed like two adversaries in the arena, measuring glances before they measure swords. The worthy Rivals believing himself to be dealing with some famous practitioner from Paris, some original genius, assumed at first a modest attitude ; but he soon perceived the disorder of this cracked brain. Then he, too, raised his voice to reply to the contemptuous jeering tone of Doctor Hirsch, who began to raise his ire, never a difficult task.

"My dear colleague, permit me to remark."

"Pardon me, my dear colleague."

It was a scene worthy of Molière—Latin and gibberish included, with this difference that in Molière's time—the type of impostor like Hirsch did not yet exist, and that it has needed our nineteenth century, overheated, over-stirring, too full of ideas, to produce him.

D'Argenton's illness formed the subject of discussion, and it was curious to note the singularly comical expression of the poet, who, on the one hand, considered that Rivals treated him too much as an imaginary invalid, and on the other, could not restrain a grimace on hearing the formidable array of complicated maladies that Doctor Hirsch declared him to be suffering from.

"Let us make an end of this," said the latter, suddenly rising. "Give me a sheet of paper and a pencil; thanks. Now by means of the plessimeter, I will draw and trace you out the complaint of our poor friend."

He drew from his vast waistcoat pocket the little wooden board called a plessimeter.

"Come here," he said to d'Argenton who had turned quite pale, and abruptly tearing aside his coat, he spread the sheet of paper over his chest, moving the plessimeter

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on it, sounding as he went along and tracing the lines with his pencil at the same time. Then he spread the paper covered with hieroglyphics on the table like a geographical map drawn by a child.

"Now you can judge for yourself," he said. "This is our friend's liver, drawn exactly from nature. Frankly now, has it the appearance of a liver? There is where it ought to be, and here is where it is. And observe the gigantic proportions it has acquired at the expense of the other organs. You can imagine what disorder and ravages it must cause!"

With a few strokes of the pencil executed in a vigorous zigzag he indicated the damage.

"It is frightful!" murmured d'Argenton, who gazed at the drawing in consternation, his pallor of the previous moment deepening to yellow.

Charlotte felt her eyes fill with tears.

"And you believe all that, do you?" burst forth old Rivals; "but that is the medical knowledge of a savage. You are being turned into ridicule."

"Permit me, dear colleague——"

But the old fellow would not listen; he had taken a stronger grog than usual and the battle raged with terrible fierceness.

Standing face to face and brandishing their fists, they hurled at each other's heads the names of doctors, the titles of books—Greek, Latin, Scandinavian, Hindoo, Chinese, Cochin-Chinese. Hirsch had the best of it with his quotations a yard long, the exactitude of which, owing to their strangeness, no one could verify; but old Rivals triumphed with his formidable blast of voice, the energy and picturesque style of his language, and he finally replaced arguments by the threat, embellished by an oath or two, of chucking his opponent overboard.

Neither Jack nor Charlotte were alarmed at this violent discussion; they had assisted at many more violent at the Gymnase. As for Labassindre, losing patience at the impossibility of putting in a word, he had moved to the balustrade of the terrace, and leaning dreamily upon it, poured forth to the sleeping woods his deep and resounding "note."

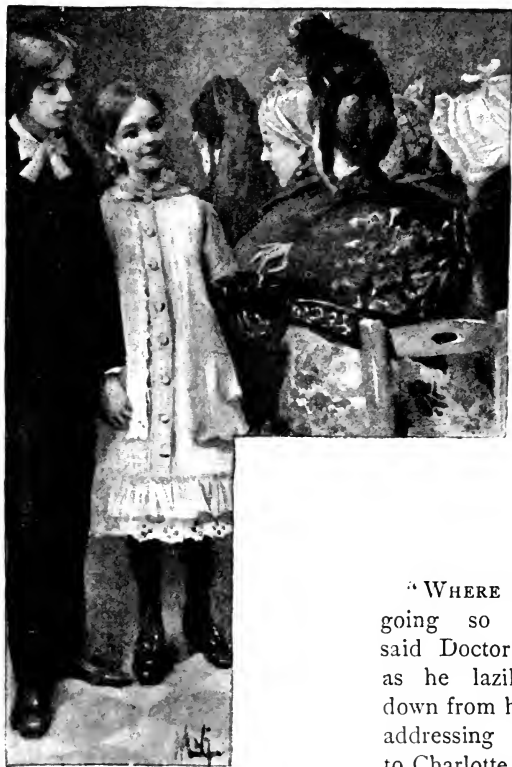
All the air around was aroused by it. A beating of wings was heard in the foliage, and the peacocks of the neighbouring habitations, nervous, timid birds, replied by those cries of alarm they utter in summer days when a storm is impending. The peasants, too, in the depths of their cottages hard by were awakened. Old Salé and her husband ventured a glance of curiosity towards the lighted windows of the Parisians, while the moon shone on the little white wall, on which stood out in golden letters the motto of the house, "*Parva Domus, Magna Quies.*" "Small house, great repose."

X.

CÉCILE.



The doctor's great pleasure was to take the children with him on his rounds.



"WHERE are you going so early?" said Doctor Hirsch, as he lazily came down from his room, addressing himself to Charlotte who was already dressed, her prayer-book in hand and followed by Jack

whom she had arrayed for the occasion in the favourite suit of Lord Peambock, which, although lengthened, was still too short for him.

"We are going to mass, my dear sir; I offer the *pain*

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*bénit** to-day. Did not d'Argenton tell you? Come, make haste. We must all go to church this morning."

It was the fifteenth of August, the feast of the Assumption. Greatly flattered at the honour conferred on her, Madame d'Argenton started as the last bells were ringing, and took her place with Jack in the reserved bench near the choir. The church was all lighted up for the festival, and bright with flowers and sunlight. The choristers were arrayed in freshly-ironed white surplices, and in front of the choir, on a rough table displayed to the admiration of the public, rose in golden columns the piles of *pain bénit*. To complete the decorative effect, all the gamekeepers of the forest in their green uniforms with their hunting knives slung by their side and guns grounded, had come to join in the *Te Deum* of the official fête to the intense delight of the poachers and wood pilferers.

Most assuredly, Ida de Barancy would have been much astonished if, a year before, she had been told that she would one day, under the name of Vicomtesse d'Argenton, take a seat in the choir of a village church, and with most decorous mien, her eyes bent on her book, have the appearance and enjoy the consideration and prestige of a married woman.

She was amused at a *rôle* so new to her. She kept an eye on Jack, religiously turned the pages of her prayer-book, and sank down on her knees with a rustling of skirts that was quite edifying.

At the offertory, the beadle, armed with his halberd, came up to fetch little Jack, and bent down to ask his mother which little girl he would choose to carry round the bag. For a moment Charlotte hesitated. She hardly knew anyone in the Sunday congregation, where bonnets

* Bread presented each Sunday by one of the principal inhabitants. and blessed by the priest and handed round during mass.

and flowers, and Parisian crinolines had replaced the caps and working frocks of week days. Then the beadle pointed out Doctor Rivals' little girl, a pretty child seated at the opposite side of the choir, next to an old lady dressed in black.

The two children started off behind the majestic halberd which rhythmically marked their short steps. Cécile carried a velvet bag too wide for her hands, while Jack held a tall wax taper decorated with satin ribbons, artificial flowers, and wreathed in twisted silver paper. They were as pretty one as the other ; he with his highland suit which made him look taller, she simply dressed with her hair in long plaits, and her grey eyes, of a soft pearl grey, beaming in the clear pallor of her ivory-tinted complexion. A delicious aroma of *pain bénit* mingled with the perfume of incense, floated around them in the church, like a hallowed and religious breath. Cécile presented the bag with a timid smile ; Jack was serious, the little hand in a white silk glove trembling in his hand, gave him the touching impression of a bird he might have just caught in the woods, warm and soft as a feathered nest. Did he already feel that that little hand would be his friend, that from that hand all his happiness in life would come ?

They went along from bench to bench.

"They're a pretty little couple," said the keeper's wife on seeing them pass, and in a low, quite a low tone, so as not to be overheard, she added : "Poor darling ! She will be even prettier than her mother. I hope she will not be as unfortunate."

When the collection was over, and Jack had returned to his place, he still fancied he felt the charm inspired by the little hand he had held so lightly, but his pleasure was not to end there. As they went out, in the crowded

little square, where the firemen's helmets and the keeper's gun shone in the sunlight amongst the many coloured dresses, Madame Rivals came up to the d'Argentons and asked leave to take Jack home to breakfast, and to keep him for the afternoon to play with her little granddaughter. Charlotte blushed with delight, and fastening the child's tie and stroking his pretty locks, she kissed him, saying :

“ Be a good boy.”

And the little things, as in their solemn peregrination round the church, went off together in front of the grand-mamma who found a certain difficulty in keeping up with them.

From that day forth, whenever Jack was absent and an inquiry was made as to his whereabouts, it was no longer said, “ He is in the forest,” but with far more certainty, “ He is at the Rivals.”

The Doctor inhabited at the further end of the village a one-storied house, very similar to those of the peasants, and distinguished from them only by a brass plate and a bell near the door with the words, “ Night-bell.” It was old, with blackened walls and wooden shutters ; but a few unfinished modern improvements indicated that there had been at some former time an attempt made at freshening it up, which a sudden catastrophe had interrupted and cut short. For instance, above the door a zinc verandah awaited its glass roof, and held over the folk who rang the bell the empty edge of its frame. In the same way, to the right of a little yard planted with trees, a pavilion had been begun, and had got no further than the ground floor in which the windows and doors were marked by square holes.

The “ misfortune ” of these poor people had befallen them just at the moment of the repairs and, by a super-

stition that will be understood by those who love, the work had been interrupted and abandoned.

That was eight years ago. Since then things had remained in the same condition, and although all the village was accustomed to the sight, this unfinished state lent to the whole habitation the discouraged physiognomy of one who cares for nothing and whose one answer to all is: "What is the use." The garden, which was behind the house, at the end of the whitewashed passage, presented a floating curtain of verdure, and was also left in a state of absolute neglect. Grass invaded the paths, and great parasite leaves covered the pond where the fountain no longer played.

The aspect of the inhabitants resembled that of their surroundings. From Madame Rivals who after eight years still wore deep mourning for her daughter, unrelieved even by a white cap, down to little Cécile who bore on her childish face an expression of seriousness and melancholy unnatural at her age, and the old servant who had been with these kind folk some thirty years and took her share of their troubles, each one lived with the same oppressive grief entombed in silence.

The Doctor alone escaped from this general feeling. His continual drives through the country, the forced distractions on the way, perhaps also the philosophy of those who often see death, had aided no doubt the natural dispositions of a frank and open temperament, very versatile and disposed to mirth.

Whereas the constant presence of little Cécile, in whose features she could retrace the likeness to the dead mother, was for Madame Rivals a perpetual renewal of her grief, the Doctor, on the contrary, recovered his spirits as the child in growing up, little by little restored to him as it were the lost daughter. When he had been out all day,

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and he found himself after dinner—his wife being busy about some household matter—alone with the child, he had a return of youth and fun ; songs of the sea burst forth with all the strength of his powerful lungs, but they soon stopped short before the silent reproach Madame Rivals threw him as she entered, before that look that seemed to say “Remember,” as though he were in some way to blame for the terrible misfortune that had befallen them.

This simple recall of his sadness was sufficient to dismay and silence him, and he would remain quietly playing with the child’s hair.

In this society, Cécile’s childhood was a melancholy one. She hardly went out, lived in the garden or in a large room called the “surgery,” which was full of little compartments with bundles of herbs and roots drying on the shelves. From this room, a door, ever closed, communicated with the room of the young girl they mourned—a room in which every stage of her short life was marked by some relic belonging to it : playthings, lesson-books, religious books or articles of dress : her books, her dresses arranged in the closets, a picture of a first communion hanging on the wall, a museum of yellow and faded relics into which the mother with pious care alone entered, her regrets never lessened by the marks of time visible in the frailty of things.

Little Cécile would often remain lost in thought before that threshold closed like a grave. Indeed she pondered too much. She had never been sent to school, they seemed to fear for her the contact of the other children of the village ; but this isolation was baneful. Her little body suffered from too much inaction. It lacked the wild vivacity, the noisy shouts, the senseless rushing to and fro of children uncontrolled by the criticising or fault-finding presence of older people.

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"She must be amused," Monsieur Rivals would say to his wife. "Young d'Argenton is a charming boy, about her own age, and he will not gossip."

"Yes, but who are they, these people? Where do they come from. Nobody knows them." Madame Rivals would cautiously reply.

"The best of folk, my dear. The husband is eccentric, it is true; but you know how artists are. The wife is rather silly but a good woman. As for their respectability, I am ready to vouch for it."

Madame Rivals shook her head. She had not much faith in her husband's perspicacity.

"Oh you, you know—"

And she sighed with a reproachful glance at him.

Old Rivals hung his head like one guilty. He held however to his idea.

"Take care," he said, "the child is dull. She will end by falling ill. And then what? Jack is but a child, Cécile also, what can happen?"

At last the grandmother allowed herself to be persuaded, and Jack became Cécile's constant companion.

Life now completely changed for him. At first he did not go very often, then gradually he went more frequently, till at last he went every day. Madame Rivals soon took a liking for the child's tender and discreet nature, repressed by indifference, as Cécile's was by melancholy. She saw the neglect he was left in, the buttons missing on his jacket and the idleness of his life, free at all hours of the day from lessons or studies.

"Do you not go to school, little Jack?"

"No, madame."

And he added—for the hearts of children are often full of delicacy—"Mamma teaches me."

Poor Charlotte! She would indeed have found that a

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difficult task with her linnet brain. Moreover it was easy to see that nobody at his home bestowed any attention on him.

"It is astonishing," said Madame Rivals to her husband, "how they allow that boy to wander idly about all day long."

"It cannot be helped," the Doctor would reply to excuse his friends. "It appears he will not work, or at least he cannot. His head is rather weak."

"Yes, his head may be weak, but the fact is, his step-father dislikes him. The children of a first marriage are always treated like pariahs."

Jack found true friends in this house. Cécile was devoted to him, and was never happy without him. They played together in the garden when it was fine, or if not, in the surgery. Madame Rivals was always there. As there was no apothecary at Etiolles she made up the simplest of her husband's medicines; the cough-mixtures, powders, and syrups. During the thirty years that she had been thus employed the old lady had acquired a great deal of experience, and many would come in the absence of the Doctor to consult her. The children delighted in these visits, spelling out on the great thick bottles, the uncouth Latin—*sirupus gummi*; or else, armed with a pair of scissors, cut out the labels, prepared the little paper bags, he with the awkwardness of a boy and Cécile with the serious attention of a little girl who intends one day to be a useful woman, ready for the minutia of an industrious and sedentary existence.

She followed the example of her grandmother, who made up the medicines and kept her husband's books in order. She also copied down his prescriptions, saw to the money and noted down the visits made in the day.



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“Come, where have you been to-day?” she would ask the Doctor on his return.

The worthy man would forget half his visits, voluntarily or involuntarily, suppressing some, for he was as generous as he was absent-minded. There were bills due to him for the last twenty years. Oh, if he had not had his wife, what wasteful disorder there would have been! She would gently scold him, pour out his grog, and see to all the details of his toilet; and already the little girl had taken the habit, when he started, of saying gravely: “Come here, grandpapa, that I may see you are tidy.”

The kind-heartedness of this man was almost super-human.

It could be seen in his clear and innocent eyes, child-like, yet devoid of a child's natural mischievousness. Notwithstanding his having been all over the world, and having been acquainted with many men and many countries, science had kept him unsophisticated. He did not believe in evil and bestowed the same indulgence on all living creatures, man or beast. It was thus that, in order not to fatigue his horse, a faithful companion of the last twenty years, whenever the path was steep or the road stony or even if the animal lagged a little, he would get out of his gig, and walk on bare-headed through sun, wind or rain, leading the beast quietly by the bridle.

The horse had fitted himself likewise to his master's habits; he knew, for instance, that the Doctor often lingered over his visits, could not make up his mind to take leave, and he had a manner of his own of shaking the reins at the door of the patients. At other times, when it was the hour to go home to breakfast or dinner, he would stop in the middle of the road, and obstinately refuse to turn in any other direction than that of home.

“Yes, to be sure, you are quite right,” Rivals would say.

Then they either quickly returned home, or else they quarrelled.

"Ah! but you are becoming quite a nuisance," scolded the kind doctor. "Was there ever such an animal? Don't you understand that I am telling you I have another visit still to make? Go home alone if you like."

Upon which he would run off in a rage to his patient, while the horse, as obstinate as he, quickly returned to the village, dragging the lightened carriage, now empty of all save books and papers, and the peasants would say as they saw it pass:

"Ah! Monsieur Rivals has again fallen out with his horse."

Henceforth the Doctor's great pleasure was to take the children with him on his rounds. The gig was wide, and held the three comfortably, and once seated between these two laughing little faces the poor fellow felt the melancholy of his home disappear and vanish in the admirable view of nature, which lulls and soothes and hushes all sorrow. With these children he was as merry as a child. Jack, too, was delighted; he had never seen so many green fields, vineyards, and so much water.

"Guess what is growing there?" Cécile would say to him, pointing to the green slopes which reach down to the Seine with a swaying motion like that of waves. "Barley? or, wheat? or, rye?"

Jack always made a mistake. And how they laughed over it.

"Will you believe it, grandpapa? He actually thought this was rye."

Then she taught him to distinguish between the rounded wheat ears, and the bearded barley, the light waving oats, the pink sainfoin, and the purple lucern, and the golden-yellow patches of rape, all the many

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coloured tints of the meadows, the green crops, which are gathered up in the autumn in separate stacks dotted over the country side.

Wherever the Doctor was sent for, the children were made welcome.

Sometimes they would go to a farm, and while Monsieur Rivals climbed up the wooden stairs leading to the bedroom, they were carried off to see the young broods of chickens, the bread taken out of the oven, the cows being milked at the stable door; at other times the visit would be to one of those water-mills built on the Orge, the Yères or the Essonne, so like ancient strongholds, with their grass-grown footbridges, and the mouldy aspect that the water sheds giving their great walls and disjointed stones an appearance of antiquity.

When the children were tired of the large white rooms, in which the dust of the flour perpetually rises from the shaken floor and walls, they would spend hours watching the water-wheel, the foam of the mill-dam, and above yonder on the little peaceful narrowed stream, a watery poultry yard where a troop of ducks were disporting themselves.

Illness is a curious thing in those peasant homes. It neither stops nor hinders anything. The cattle go in and out at the usual hours. If the man is ill, the wife replaces him, and has no time to nurse him or be anxious or unhappy. Neither land nor animals can wait. The house-wife at work all day long, is worn out at night and sleeps heavily. The unhappy creature lying up above over the room where the mill grinds, the stable where the cattle bellow, is the wounded soldier fallen during the battle. No one heeds him. They rest satisfied with sheltering him in a corner, propping him against a tree, or by the side of a ditch, while the struggle which demands

all the able-bodied men, still rages. All around, the corn is thrashed and sifted, the cocks loudly crow. There is an uninterrupted activity and animation while the master of the house, his face turned to the wall, awaits resigned, mute and stern till the falling night or dawning day shall end his pain or his life.

And that is the reason why, in the peasants' houses they frequented, the children found no sadness. They were petted and made much of. There was always a cake ready baked for them, choice oats for the horse, a basket of fruit ready to send to the grandmother.

The Doctor was so kind and so heedless of his own interests. The peasants loved and at the same time imposed upon him.

"He is such a charitable gentleman," they said when they mentioned him. "Oh! if he had chosen, he would have been a rich man now!"

Meanwhile they managed never to pay his bill which with a man of his character was an easy matter. When after a consultation he left a house, he was immediately surrounded by a persevering and noisy crew. Never was any king's coach so besieged as the Doctor's humble gig at the moment of his departure.

"Monsieur Rivals, what must I give my little girl?"

"And my poor man, Monsieur Rivals, can nothing be done for him?"

"Was it to eat or to rub in, that powder you gave me? Have you got a pinch left? I've nearly finished mine?"

The Doctor listened to every one, looked at their tongues, felt their pulses, distributed little packets of powder, quinine wine, all he had, till at last he went off emptied, fleeced and squeezed out, amid the acclamations and benedictions of the assembled crowd, who, wiping away a tear of emotion, exclaimed: "What an excellent

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man," with a mischievous wink at the same time, as though adding: "How green he is." And he might consider himself lucky, if at the very last moment some little messenger in wooden shoes did not come and ask him to go "quickly" to a sick person some sixteen miles off.

At last they would turn home, and those drives in the setting sun through the forest paths overshadowed by the long branches, or down the country roads enlivened by flights of swallows, or children playing, or wandering cattle, were delightful in their profound and delicious peacefulness. The Seine, already of a bluish tint in the shade, ran towards the horizon like golden liquid. On its luminous background, the clumps of slender trees leafy only at the top like palm-trees, the white houses rising in tiers on the hillside suddenly imparted to the landscape an Eastern aspect, dreamed of rather than seen—one of those cities of Judea represented in pictures, bounding the far horizon of a "Holy Family" wending its way over some rising ground in front under the rays of a setting sun.

"It looks like Nazareth," Cécile would say, calling to mind some Scriptural pictures, and the two children talked, told each other stories in a low tone while the gig rolled on towards a supper that Jack often shared.

The result of all these drives was that Monsieur Rivals discovered that little d'Argenton had an open intelligence, a concentrated but thoughtful mind, in which the little instruction he had received had left deep traces. With his generous kindness he quickly comprehended how abandoned the child was by his own people, and he determined to supply the deficiency. He took the habit every day after breakfast, of making him work for one hour during the time he habitually devoted to his siesta. Those who know what the habit of a siesta is after meals, will

understand what courage and abnegation it required to give it up.

On his side, Jack applied himself as diligently as possible.

Study became easy to him in the industrious calm of Rivals' house. Cécile was nearly always present at lesson time, and religiously listened to her friend reciting the Epitome, watching him with a thoughtful gaze as though the better to help him to understand, and feeling proud and happy when, after breakfast, her grandfather spread out the copybooks on the table and said : " That is very good indeed !" with a satisfied and surprised look.

At his mother's, Jack never spoke of his lessons. He rejoiced at the idea of being able to prove to her victoriously that the poet had been mistaken in his infallible and terrific diagnosis, and this little plot between the kind Doctor and him, easily remained undiscovered, for the inhabitants of "*Parva domus*" noticed him less and less. He came and went at his pleasure, and where he chose, returning only for the meals and seating himself at the end of the table, which was each day lengthened and surrounded by fresh guests.

To fill his solitude, and keep up around him the noisy vacuity he called "an intellectual circle," d'Argenton had thrown his house wide open to all the "Failures." The poet, however, was not fond of throwing away his money, he was in truth avaricious and each time Charlotte said timidly : " I have no more money, dear," he answered by a significant "Already," and a discouraging frown.

But vanity carried the day, and the pleasure of ostentatiously displaying his happiness, of being a host, of exciting the envy of all these poor devils, overcame his best weighed calculations.

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It became known in the world of the "Failures," that yonder, in the fresh country air, there was a delightful spot, a capital table and excellent quarters if perchance the last train should be missed. And they would call from one end to the other of the ale-houses :

"Who is coming to the d'Argentons?"

Then the money necessary for the trip having been scraped together a large party would suddenly make its appearance. Charlotte was at her wits' end.

"Quick, Mother Archambauld, here come some friends; kill a rabbit—two rabbits. Quick, an omelet—two omelets—three omelets."

"Lawks a mercy, my heavens! What a set!" the scared keeper's wife would exclaim; for there were constantly new faces, and such manes, such beards, and such manners! D'Argenton always enjoyed the same satisfaction in taking the new comers over the house, and making them admire the improvements. When this had been done the troop of grey-bearded schoolboys would wander off along the roads, by the river side, in the woods, with the neighing delight and the mad capers of old horses turned out to grass.

In the fresh landscape these napless hats, threadbare black coats, these cheeks hollowed by all the envious suffering of Parisian misery, appeared still more sordid, faded, and withered. Then they gathered round the table—a table laid all day long and from which there was not time between each meal to brush away the crumbs. They dawdled away whole afternoons, drinking, discussing and smoking.

It was the ale-house carried into the country.

D'Argenton triumphed. He could reiterate his sem-piternal poem, repeat the same plans ten times over, say at every moment: "I, my. I, my," with the authority of

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a gentleman to whom the good wine, the house, everything in short belonged. Charlotte, too, was very happy. To her changeable nature and Bohemian instincts all these comings and goings lent a renewal of youth ; she was courted, admired, and, while remaining faithful to her love, she knew how to show just enough coquetry with the others to rouse the poet, and make him appreciate his happiness.

On Sunday she received the " Failures' " wives, courageous creatures who feverishly toiled all the week, and to whom their husbands vouchsafed from time to time the luxury of an outing with them. Towards these she played the great lady, called them " my good friends " and displayed her elegant Louis XV. wrappers by the side of their second-hand attire.

But among all the " Failures," the most constant at Les Aulnettes were Labassindre and Doctor Hirsch. The latter, who had come for a few days' visit had now been there for months, and the house had almost become his property. He did the honours, wore the poet's linen, his hats, the lining of which he stuffed with whole reams of paper ; for the head of this whimsical fellow was excessively small—so small, indeed, that looking at it, one wondered how he had crammed so many things into it, and one was no longer astonished at the extraordinary confusion caused by such promiscuous warehousing.

Such as he was d'Argenton could not do without him. He had in him a confidant attentive to all the discomforts of his imaginary complaint ; and although he had no great opinion of Hirsch's science, although he was careful never to swallow his physic, his presence reassured him.

" It is I who have set him on his feet again ! " impudently declared the other. And Doctor Rivals


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had in consequence lost much of his authority in the house.

However, days and months went by. Autumn enveloped "*Parva domus*" with its melancholy fogs, and winter's snow covered the pigeon-house. April showers now again clattered down on its resounding slated roof, and a new spring garlanded it with flowery lilacs. Otherwise nothing had changed. The poet had only a plan or two more to add to the others; and had discovered a few more new symptoms of his imaginary disease, which the inevitable Hirsch had designated with new and fanciful names. Charlotte was still as insignificant, pretty and sentimental as ever. Jack had grown and worked very hard. In ten months without system or rules, he had made wonderful progress, and knew more than most boys of his age.

"This is what I have done for him in a year," Monsieur Rivals said proudly to the d'Argentons. "Send him to a public school, and I guarantee this little fellow will become somebody!"

"Oh! Doctor, Doctor, how kind you are!" exclaimed Charlotte, rather abashed at the indirect reproof contained in the anxious care of this stranger, compared with her maternal indifference. D'Argenton took it more coolly, said he would see, he would reflect, that a public school presented many serious disadvantages. When he found himself again alone with Charlotte, he gave way to his bad temper:

"What business is it of that fellow? Everyone knows his own duty in life. Does he fancy he is going to teach me mine? He had much better study his physics, that village Sawbones."

But in truth his pride had been deeply wounded. From that day forth he often declared with a solemn air

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"The Doctor is right, I must look after that child."

Alas for the child, he did look after him!

"Come here my lad," Labassindre the singer called out to little Jack, as he was walking in the garden one day in deep confabulation with Hirsch and d'Argenton. The child timidly approached, he was not in the habit of being spoken to by either the poet or his friends.

"Who made—*beûh! beûh!*—the squirrel trap that is in the big walnut tree—*beûh! beûh!*—at the end of the garden?"

Jack turned pale, expecting a scolding, but as he would not tell a lie, he answered:

"It is I."

Cécile having expressed the wish to have a squirrel, he had invented a trap, made with wires crossed and twisted in an ingenious manner which, though it had not yet caught any squirrel, was quite capable of doing so.

"You really invented it alone, without a model?"

He answered diffidently:

"Why yes, Monsieur Labassindre. I had no model."

"It is extraordinary, most extraordinary!" repeated the fat singer, turning to his companions. "That child is a born mechanic. He has it in his fingers. He can't help it, it's instinctive! it's a gift!"

"Ah, there it is, a gift!" said the poet, raising his head proudly.

Doctor Hirsch also bridled up:

"Of course, hang it! it's a gift!"

And without taking any further notice of the child, they went on with their walk in the orchard, solemnly, slowly, with pompous gestures, and long pauses as one or other of them uttered some very important opinion.

In the evening they had a lengthy discussion on the terrace.

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"You see, Comtesse," said Labassindre, addressing Charlotte as though he wished to convince her on a point which had already been discussed between them—"you see the man of the future is the working man. The days of the aristocracy are over, the middle class has but a few more years to exist. Now is the day of the working man. Do not despise his horny hands and his sacred smock-frock. In another twenty years, that very smock-frock will rule the world."

"He is right," said d'Argenton gravely, while the little head of Doctor Hirsch nodded an energetic approval.

It was singular that Jack, who was accustomed from the early days of the *Gymnase* to the singer's tirades on social questions to which he never listened, finding them a bore, should on that night have felt so much emotion at hearing him hold forth, as though he instinctively guessed, poor child, the intention that directed the seemingly incoherent words, and the person whom they menaced.

Labassindre proceeded to draw an enchanting picture of the working man's life.

"Oh! what a proud independent existence! When I think I was mad enough to leave it. Ah! if I had it in my power to begin over again!"

And he told them of his life as blacksmith at the iron-works of Indret, when he called himself simply Roudic instead of Labassindre, which was the name of his village: La Basse Indre, a large Breton village on the banks of the Loire. He recalled the jolly hours spent by the fire of the forge, stripped to the waist, rhythmically hammering the iron in the midst of his valiant companions.

"You know," he added, "what success I have had on the stage."

"Yes indeed," shamelessly answered Doctor Hirsch.

"You know the golden laurels, the snuff boxes, the

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medals that have been showered upon me. Well, not one of these souvenirs is as precious to me as this."

Turning his shirt-sleeve up to the shoulder, he bared his enormous arm, as hairy as a bear's paw, and proudly showed a great red and blue tattooing which represented two forge hammers crossed and surrounded by a wreath of oak leaves, with the following inscription: *Work and liberty*. From a distance it looked like the indelible mark of a tremendous blow, and the fellow did not add that this tattooing, which no rubbing or salve could efface, had been the bane of his theatrical life, for it forbade all possibility of raising his sleeves, and displaying his biceps in order to play certain parts, such as in *La Muette* or *Herculaneum*, in which the heroes of the sunny south, with bare arms upraised, throw back the drapery from their conquering breasts.

Abandoning all hope of effacing this tattooing, Labassindre now wore it as a badge, and brandished it like a banner. Ah! how he cursed the theatrical manager of Nantes who had heard him one evening at the ironworks when he was singing for a wounded comrade! How he cursed, too, the incomparable note with which nature had endowed him. If it had not been for this, he would now be like his brother Roudic, foreman of a shop at the ironworks of Indret with a magnificent salary, his rent free, light and firing and a pension assured for his old age.

"Certainly, certainly, that is grand!" Charlotte timidly said, "but one must have the strength to bear such a life. I have heard you say yourself that it was a very hard, a very laborious existence."

"Hard certainly for a milksop; but that is not the case here, for it seems to me the person in question has an excellent constitution "

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"Admirable constitution," said Doctor Hirsch. "I can answer for that."

Of course if he answered for it, there was nothing more to add.

However, Charlotte still endeavoured to make a few objections. According to her, all natures were not alike. Certain natures were more refined, more aristocratic than others, and were more repelled by such kinds of labour.

Upon which d'Argenton rose furious.

"All women are the same," he exclaimed roughly. "Here is one who begs and implores me to take charge of this young gentleman,—and Heaven knows it is no pleasant task, for he is indeed a sorry sort of fellow! And yet when I do what she asks, when I consult my friends and beg their assistance, she seems to think I had much better have left things alone."

"That is not what I mean," whimpered Charlotte, in despair at having offended her lord.

"No, no, that is not what she meant," repeated the others, and feeling herself supported by their intervention, the poor woman gave way to a flood of tears, like a beaten child who only dares to cry when it feels itself protected. Jack abruptly left the terrace. He could not bear to see his mother cry and be unable to jump at the throat of her tormentor.

The following day nothing more was said on the subject. Only the child fancied that a change had come over his mother's attitude towards him. She looked at him, and kissed him oftener than before, kept him near her, and made him feel, in her embraces the passionate clasp which tells of approaching separation. He was all the more upset at these signs, that he heard d'Argenton say to Monsieur Rivals with the bitter smile that raised his heavy moustachios :

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“ Doctor, I am busying myself about your pupil—one of these days I shall have some news for you. I think you will be satisfied.”

Whereupon the good man would return home delighted.

“ You see,” he would say to his wife, “ I did well to open their eyes.”

But Madame Rivals only shook her head :

“ Who knows? I don’t like that deadly glance of his ; it forebodes nothing good for the child. When it is an enemy who looks after one, it is far better he should cross his arms and do nothing.”

Jack thought so too, poor fellow.



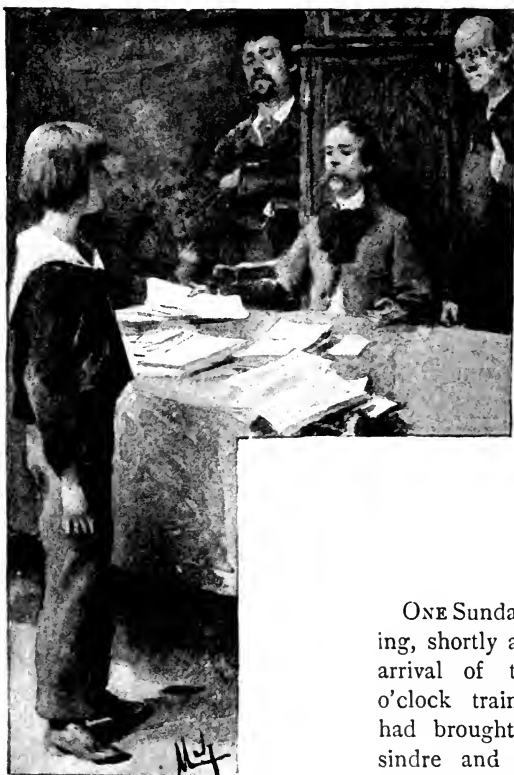
XI.

LIFE IS NOT A ROMANCE

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"Then you too send me away—you too send me away?"



ONE Sunday morning, shortly after the arrival of the ten o'clock train which had brought Labas-sindre and a noisy crew of Failures, Jack, who was busy watching a squirrel near his famous trap, heard his mother call him.

Her voice came from the poet's study, that solemn laboratory where the enemy brewed his wrath, his aimless reproaches, his cross and mean upbraiding. Warned by

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the tone of his mother's voice, or perhaps only by a sort of intelligence of the nerves so subtle in some temperaments, the child thought to himself: "It is coming to-day," and tremblingly went up the winding stairs.

In the ten months that had passed since he last entered the sanctuary many changes had taken place. The majesty of the place seemed to him attenuated. The hangings faded by the sun and impregnated with tobacco smoke, the Algerian divan burst open, the oak table split in many places, the muddy inkstand, the rusty pens testified to the idleness and desultory debating that had thrown over everything the commonplace vulgarity of a public tavern.

Alone, the Henri II. pulpit remained in the midst of the ruins, an emblem of immutable authority. It was there that d'Argenton sat to receive the child, while Labassindre and Hirsch stood by his side like assistant judges, and the weekly guests, the nephew of Berzélius, and two or three other greybeards lounged on the divan enveloped in a cloud of smoke.

Jack took it all in at one glance; the tribunal, the judge, the witnesses, and his mother, who, standing at an open window, looked out with a fixed gaze into the distance as though she would fain detach her attention and responsibility from what was about to take place.

"Come hither, stripling," said the poet, whose old oaken pulpit inspired him with a fancy for mediæval language, "come hither."

His voice, in these affected intonations, preserved such a harsh inflexible sound that it seemed as if it were the Henri II. armchair itself that was speaking.

"I have told you many a time, child, that life is not a romance. The sight of my own sufferings, of my struggles in the foremost ranks of the literary strife,

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should have enlightened you; often wearied, but never vanquished, persisting against fate, I have fought the good fight. Now it is your turn to enter the lists. You are now a man."

He was twelve years old, poor little fellow.

"You are now a man. You must prove that you have not only the age and size, but the heart also of a man. I have left you for more than a year to develop in the freedom of nature. I have allowed time for your muscles as well as your mind to acquire the requisite strength. Others have accused me of neglecting you. Oh routine! I was watching you, on the contrary, I was studying you, I never lost sight of you for one moment. Thanks to this long and conscientious study, thanks above all to the infallible method of observation which I may flatter myself I possess, I have succeeded in understanding you. I comprehend your instincts, your aptitudes, your temperament. I know in what way I must act for the furthering of your welfare, and, after having exposed the result of my observations to your mother, I have acted."

At this point of his discourse, d'Argenton paused to receive the congratulations of Doctor Hirsch and Labas-sindre, while the nephew of Berzélius and the others, silently absorbed in the fumes of their long pipes, nodded their heads like Chinese idols, and contented themselves with repeating pedantically every now and again: "Good that. Very good!"

Poor frightened Jack tried to make some meaning out of the incomprehensible phraseology which passed high above his head, like a cloud loaded with electricity. He wondered, and thought: "What is going to befall me?"

As for Charlotte, she remained looking out at the window, with her hands shading her eyes, as though intently watching something far away in the landscape.

“Let us come to the point,” said the poet abruptly, sitting upright in his pulpit, and assuming his harshest tone which stung the boy like the cut of a whip. “The letter you are about to hear read to you, will enlighten you more than all my explanations. Read it, Labas-sindre.”

The singer, with the gravity of a clerk at a court-martial, drew from his pocket what seemed to be the letter of a peasant or a recruit, roughly folded and sealed, and after one or two preparatory bellowings, read the following :—

“*The Ironworks. Indret. (Loire Inférieure.)*

“*My dear brother, as I told you in my last, I have spoken to the manager about your friend's son, and, though the young man is still very young and hardly fulfils the conditions for an apprentice, the manager has consented to my taking him as such. He will board and lodge with us, and I promise to do all I can to make a good workman of him at the end of his four years. We are all quite well. My wife and Zénaïde send you their good wishes, as also the Nantais and myself.*

“ROUDIC,

“*Foreman of the Setting-up Shop.*”

“Do you hear, Jack?” resumed d’Argenton, with flashing eyes and outstretched arm. “In four years you will be a good workman, that is to say the noblest, grandest thing that can exist in this world of slavery and servitude. In four years you will be that sacred, venerated thing, a good workman !”

Yes, indeed he heard it!—“a good workman.” Only he was bewildered and was trying to understand.

The child had seen workmen in Paris. There were

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some who lived in the Passage des Douze Maisons, and not far from the Gymnase there was a factory from which he often watched them, as they left work at about six o'clock ; a crowd of dirty-looking men with their blouses all stained with oil, and their rough hands blackened and deformed by work.

The idea that he would have to wear a blouse struck him at once. He remembered the tone of contempt with which his mother would say : " Those are workmen, men in blouses," the care she took in the streets to avoid the contact of their soiled garments. Labassindre's fine speeches on the duties and influence of the working man in the nineteenth century attenuated and contradicted it is true these vague impressions. But what he did understand, and that most clearly and bitterly, was that he must go away, leave the forest whose tree-tops he saw from the window, leave the Rivals, leave his mother, his mother whom he had recovered at the cost of so much pain, and whom he loved so tenderly.

What on earth was she doing at that window all this time, seeming so indifferent to all that was going on around her ? Within the last few minutes, however, she had lost her immovable indifference. A convulsive shudder seemed to shake her from head to foot, and the hand she held over her eyes closed over them as if she were hiding tears. Was it then so sad a sight that she beheld yonder in the country, on the far horizon where the sun sets, and where so many dreams, so many illusions, so many loves and passions sink and disappear never to return ?

" Then I shall have to go away ? " inquired the child in a smothered voice, and the automatic air of one who lets his thought speak, the one thought that absorbed him.

At this artless question, all the members of the tribunal looked at each other with a smile of pity; but over there at the window a great sob was heard.

"We shall start in a week, my lad," answered Labasindre briskly. "I have not seen my brother for a long time. I shall avail myself of this opportunity to renew my acquaintance with the fire of my old forge, by Jove!"

As he spoke, he turned back his sleeve, distending the muscles of his brawny, hairy, tattooed arm, till they looked ready to burst.

"He is superb," said Doctor Hirsch.

D'Argenton, however, who did not lose sight of the sobbing woman standing at the window, had an absent air, and a terrible frown gathering on his brow.

"You can go, Jack," he said to the child, "and prepare to start in a week."

Jack went downstairs, dazed and stupefied, repeating to himself, "In a week! in a week!" The street-door was open, he rushed out, bare-headed, just as he was, dashed through the village to the house of his friends, and meeting the Doctor, who was just going out, informed him in a few words of what had taken place.

Monsieur Rivals was indignant.

"A workman! They want to make a workman of you? Is that what they call looking after your prospects in life? Wait a moment. I am going to speak myself to Monsieur your step-father."

The villagers who saw them pass by, the worthy Doctor gesticulating and talking out loud, and little Jack, bareheaded and breathless from running, said: "There is certainly some one very ill at Les Aulnettes."

No one was ill, most assuredly. When the Doctor arrived they were sitting down to table; for on account

of the capricious appetite of the master of the house, and as in all places where *ennui* reigns supreme, the hours for the meals were constantly being changed.

The faces around were cheerful; Charlotte could even be heard humming on the stairs, as she came down from her room.

"I should like to say a word to you, Monsieur d'Argenton," said old Rivals with quivering lips.

The poet twirled his moustache :

"Well, Doctor, sit down there. They shall give you a plate and you can say your word while you eat your breakfast."

"No, thank you, I am not hungry; besides, what I have to say to you as well as to Madame"—he bowed to Charlotte, who had just come in—"is strictly private."

"I think I can guess your errand," said d'Argenton who did not care for a tête-à-tête conversation with the Doctor. "It is about the child, is it not?"

"You are right, it is about the child."

"In that case you can speak. These gentlemen know the circumstances, and my actions are always too loyal and too disinterested for me to fear the light of day."

"But, my dear," Charlotte ventured to say, shocked for many reasons at the idea of this discussion before strangers.

"You can speak, Doctor," said d'Argenton coldly.

Standing upright in front of the table, the Doctor began :

"Jack has just told me that you intend to send him as an apprentice to the ironworks at Indret. Is this serious, come?"

"Quite serious, my dear Doctor."

"Take care," pursued Monsieur Rivals, restraining his anger, "that child has not been brought up for so hard a

life. At a growing age, you are going to throw him out of his element into new surroundings, a new atmosphere. His health, his life are involved. He has none of the requisites needed to bear this. He is not strong enough."

"Oh! allow me, my dear colleague," put in Doctor Hirsch solemnly.

M. Rivals shrugged his shoulders, and without even looking at him, went on:

"It is I who tell you so, Madame."

He pointedly addressed himself to Charlotte, who was singularly embarrassed by this appeal to her repressed feelings.

"Your child cannot possibly endure a life of this sort. You surely know him, you who are his mother. You know that his nature is a refined and delicate one, and that it will be unable to resist fatigue. And here I only speak of the physical pain. But do you not know what terrible sufferings a child so well-gifted, with a mind so capable and ready to receive all kinds of knowledge will feel, in the forced inaction, the death of intellectual faculties to which you are about to condemn him?"

"You are mistaken, Doctor," said d'Argenton, who was getting very angry. I know the fellow better than anyone. I have tried him. He is only fit for manual labour. His aptitudes lie there, and there only. And it is when I furnish him with the means of developing his aptitudes, when I put into his hands a magnificent profession, that, instead of thanking me, my fine gentleman goes off complaining to strangers, seeking protectors outside of his own home."

Jack was going to protest. His friend, however, saved him the trouble.

"He did not come to complain. He only informed me of your decision, and I said to him what I now repeat


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to him before you all; Jack, my child, do not let them do it. Throw yourself into the arms of your parents, of your mother who loves you; of your mother's husband, who, for her sake, must love you. Entreat them, implore them. Ask them what you have done to deserve to be thus degraded, to be made lower than themselves."

"Doctor," exclaimed Labassindre, bringing his fist heavily down upon the table, making it tremble and shake, "the tool does not degrade the man, it ennobles him. The tool is the regenerator of mankind. Christ handled a plane, when he was ten years of age."

"That is indeed true," said Charlotte, who at once conjured up the vision of her little Jack dressed for the procession of the Fête-Dieu as the child Jesus, armed with a little plane.

"Don't be taken in by such balderdash, Madame," said the exasperated doctor. "To make a workman of your son is to separate him from you for ever. If you were to send him to the other end of the world, he could not be further from your mind, from your heart; for you would have, in this case, means of drawing together again, whereas social distances are irremediable. You will see. The day will come when you will be ashamed of your child, when you will find his hands rough, his language coarse, his sentiments totally different from yours. He will stand one day before you, before his mother, as before a stranger of higher rank than himself, not only humbled, but degraded."

Jack, who had hitherto not uttered a word but had listened attentively from a corner near the side-board, was suddenly alarmed at the idea of any possible disaffection springing up between his mother and himself.

He advanced into the middle of the room, and steadying his voice :

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"I will not be a workman," he said in a determined manner.

"Oh, Jack!" murmured Charlotte, faltering.

This time it was d'Argenton who spoke:

"Oh! really, you will not be a workman? Look at this fine gentleman who will or who will not accept a thing that I have decided. You will not be a workman, eh? But you are quite willing to be clothed, fed and amused. Well, I solemnly declare that I have had enough of you, you horrid little parasite; and that if you do not choose to work, I, for my part, refuse to be any longer your dupe."

He stopped abruptly, and passing from his mad rage to the chilly manner which was habitual to him:

"Go up to your room," he said; "I will consider what remains to be done."

"What remains to be done, my dear d'Argenton, I will soon tell you."

But Jack did not hear the end of Monsieur Rivals' phrase, d'Argenton with a shove having thrust him out.

The noise of the discussion reached him in his room, like the various parts in a great orchestra. He distinguished and recognized all the voices, but they melted one into the other, united by their resonance, and made a discordant uproar through which some bits of phrases were alone intelligible.

"It is an infamous lie."

"Messieurs! Messieurs!"

"Life is not a romance."

"Sacred blouse, *beûh! beûh!*"

At last old Rivals' voice could be heard thundering as he crossed the threshold:

"May I be hanged, if ever I put my foot in your house again."

Then the door was violently slammed, and a great silence fell on the dining-room, broken only by the clatter of knives and forks.

They were breakfasting.

"You wish to degrade him, to make him something lower than yourself." The child remembered that phrase, and he felt that this was indeed his enemy's intention.

Well, no; a thousand times no—he would not be a workman.

The door opened, and his mother came in.

She had cried a great deal, had shed real tears, tears such as furrow the cheek. For the first time, a mother showed herself in that pretty woman's face, an afflicted and sorrowing mother.

"Listen to me, Jack," she said, striving to appear severe; "I must speak very seriously to you. You have made me very unhappy by putting yourself in open rebellion against your real friends, and by refusing to accept the situation they offer you. I am well aware, that there is in the new existence ——."

While she spoke, she carefully avoided meeting the child's eyes, for they had such an expression of desperate grief and heartfelt reproach, that she would not have been able to resist their appeal.

"That there is, in the new existence we have chosen for you, an apparent inconsistency with the life you have hitherto been leading. I confess that I was myself at first rather startled by it, but you heard, did you not, what was said to you? The position of a workman is no longer what it used to be; oh, no! not at all the same thing, not at all. You must know that the time of the working-man has now come. The middle classes have had their day, the aristocracy likewise. Although, I must

say, the aristocracy——Moreover, is it not more natural at your age, to allow yourself to be guided by those who love you, and who are experienced?”

A sob from the child interrupted her.

“Then you too send me away; you too send me away.”

This time the mother could no longer resist. She took him in her arms, clasped him passionately to her heart:

“I send you away? How can you imagine such a thing? Is it possible? Come, be calm, don’t tremble and give way like that. You know how I love you, and how, if it only depended on me, we would never leave each other. But we must be reasonable, and think a little of the future. Alas! the future is already dark enough for us.”

And in one of those outbursts of words that she still had sometimes when freed from the presence of the master, she endeavoured to explain to Jack, with all kinds of hesitations and reticences, the irregularity of their position.

“You see, my darling, you are still very young; there are many things you cannot understand. Some day, when you are older, I will reveal to you the secret of your birth; quite a romance, my dear! Some day, I will tell you the name of your father, and the unheard of fatality of which your mother and yourself have been the victims. But for the present, what you must know and thoroughly comprehend, is that nothing here belongs to us, my poor child, and that we are absolutely dependent on him. How can I therefore oppose your departure, especially when I know that he wants you to leave for your good. I cannot ask him for anything more. He has already done so much for us. Besides, he is not rich, and this terrible artistic career is so expensive! He could not undertake the expense of your education.

What will become of me, between you two? We must come to a decision. Remember that it was a profession you were being given. Would you not be proud of being independent, of gaining your own livelihood, of being your own master?"

She saw at once by the flash in the child's eye, that she had struck home, and in a low tone, in the caressing, coaxing voice of a mother, she murmured:—

"Do it for my sake, Jack; will you? Put yourself in a position that will enable you soon to gain your livelihood. Who knows if some day, I may not be obliged myself to have recourse to you as my only protector, my only friend."

Did she really think what she said? Was it a presentiment, one of those sudden glimpses into the future, which unfolds to us our destiny, and reveals the failure and disappointments of our existence? Or had she been merely carried away in the whirlwind words of her impulsive sentimentality?

In any case, she could not have found a better argument to convince that little generous spirit. The effect was instantaneous. The idea that his mother might want him, that he could help her by his work, suddenly decided him.

He looked her straight in the face.

"Swear that you will always love me, that you will never be ashamed of me when my hands are blackened?"

"If I shall love you, my Jack!"

Her only answer was to cover him with kisses, hiding her agitation and her remorse under her passionate embraces; but from that moment the wretched woman knew remorse, knew it for the rest of her life; and could never think of her child without feeling a stab in her heart.

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He however, as though he understood all the shame, uncertainty and terror concealed under these caresses, dashed towards the stairs, to avoid dwelling on it.

"Come, mamma, let us go down. I am going to tell him I accept his offer."

Downstairs the "Failures" were still at table. They were all struck by the grave and determined look on Jack's face.

"I beg your pardon," he said to d'Argenton. "I did wrong in refusing your proposal. I now accept it, and thank you."

"That is right, child," said the poet, solemnly; "I did not doubt that reflection would overcome your opposition. I am happy to see that you recognize the honesty of my intentions. You must thank our friend Labassindre also, for it is to him you owe this piece of good luck. It is he who has opened the future to you."

The singer held out his big paw, in which Jack's little hand completely disappeared.

"Your fist, old pal," he said to him, affecting to treat him as if they were old comrades, working at the same furnace, in the same factory; and from that day till they left, he never spoke to him but in the brutal and familiar tone that workmen adopt towards each other as a bond of union.

During that last week, Jack did nothing but ramble over the woods and fields. He felt disturbed, more anxious indeed than sad, and from time to time the idea of the responsibility he was going to assume lent to his pretty face an unusual expression, that line between the brows which, in young people, marks the effort of will.

He was now old Jack. He went to visit all his favourite haunts, as a man would retrace step by step the pilgrimage of his childhood.

Oh ! old Mother Salé might threaten him from afar, run after him, old Jack no longer feared her, and even felt as if he were strong enough to carry her faggot. But what distressed him most was not being able to go to the Rivals' house and bid good-bye to Cécile.

"You see, my dear Jack, after the scene that took place, it would not be proper," Charlotte repeated in reply to all her son's entreaties.

At last, on the very eve of his departure, in the cruel joy of his triumph, d'Argenton consented to the child's going and saying good-bye to his friends. He went to their house in the evening. There was no one in the hall, no one in the surgery where the shutters were closed. Nothing was visible but a streak of light from the library, or rather what they called the library, a big garret encumbered with dictionaries, atlases, medicine books, and great red bound volumes of the Panckouke edition.

The doctor was there, busily engaged in packing a box of books.

"Ah, here you are," said he to the child ; "I was sure you would not leave without saying good-bye to me. They would not allow you to come, eh ? It is also rather my own fault. I was a little too sharp. My wife scolded me dreadfully ; by-the-bye, you know she went off yesterday with our little girl. I have sent them to the Pyrenees, to spend a month at my sister's. The little one was not very well. I was stupid enough to tell her abruptly about your departure, without any warning. Ah, indeed, people fancy children do not feel things ; but their grief is more violent and desperate than ours."

He spoke to Jack as to a man. Everybody spoke to him now as if he were a man ; and yet at the thought that his little friend had been ill at the idea of his going away

without seeing her, old Jack felt inclined to cry like a child.

He looked at the scattered books, the big room so sadly lighted by one candle placed on the table beside the grog and the brandy bottle ; for Monsieur Rivals had taken advantage of his wife's absence to return to his seafaring habits. And the good fellow's eye was brighter than usual, and he displayed a singular animation in rummaging out his books, blowing off the dust from the old red edges of the volumes, and emptying all one corner of his shelves in the open box at his feet.

"Do you know what I am doing, my lad ?"

"No, Monsieur Rivals."

"I am choosing some books for you, some good old-fashioned books, that you will take away with you and read ; do you hear, read, as soon as you have a moment's leisure. Remember my dear child, that books are true friends, you can always appeal to them in all the hardships and worries of life, and they will never fail you. As for me, if I had not had my books, after the misfortune that befell me, I should have died long ago. Look at this little box, lad. They are a nice lot, eh ? I am not sure that you will understand them all now. But that does not signify, you must read them all the same. Even those you do not understand will throw some light into your brain. Promise me you will read them ?"

"I promise, Monsieur Rivals."

"There, now the box is quite full. Can you carry it away with you ? No, it is too heavy. I will send it to-morrow. Now come, that I may bid you farewell."

And the worthy man, taking Jack's head in his broad hands, kissed him two or three times very affectionately.

"That is for both Cécile and myself," he added with



a kindly smile; and as he closed the door, Jack heard him murmur: "Poor child—poor child!"

Just like the Fathers at Vaugirard. Only now he understood why he was pitied.

The next day, Les Aulnettes was in great commotion over Jack's departure.

The luggage was being loaded on a cart brought up to the door. Labassindre, in the most extraordinary get-up, as though he were starting for an expedition through the Pampas, arrayed in high gaiters, a short green velvet jacket, and a leathern bag slung over his shoulders, wandered to and fro, throwing out his note.

The poet was radiant and solemn at the same time; solemn because he felt he was accomplishing a humanitarian and social function; radiant, because the child's departure filled him with joy. Charlotte kissed Jack again and again, and looked to see that nothing had been forgotten.

No, nothing had been forgotten. He was even too well dressed for a working man, in his scanty costume of the famous *pain bénit* day; but he shared the fate of those who grow too quickly, and are condemned during their youth to the perpetual discomfort of having outgrown their clothes.

"You will take great care of him, Monsieur Labassindre."

"As much care as of my note, Madame."

"Jack!"

"Mamma!"

There was a last embrace. Charlotte sobbed. The child, however, would not show his emotion. The thought that he was going to work for his mother made old Jack strong. At the bottom of the road, he turned round once more to look and carry away in his mind's

eye the wood, the house, the orchard, the woman's face that smiled to him through her tears.

"Write often, my Jack," cried the mother.

And the poet said solemnly:—

"Remember, Jack, life is not a romance."

Life is not a romance; but it was one for him at least, the miserable wretch!

Had there been any doubt, one need only see him on the threshold of his little house, under the gilded motto, leaning on his Charlotte, in the midst of the climbing roses, in the pretentious attitude of a coloured lithograph, so overflowing with beaming and satisfied egotism, that for an instant he forgot all his hatred, and wafted a fatherly blessing and adieu to the child he had just cast out.

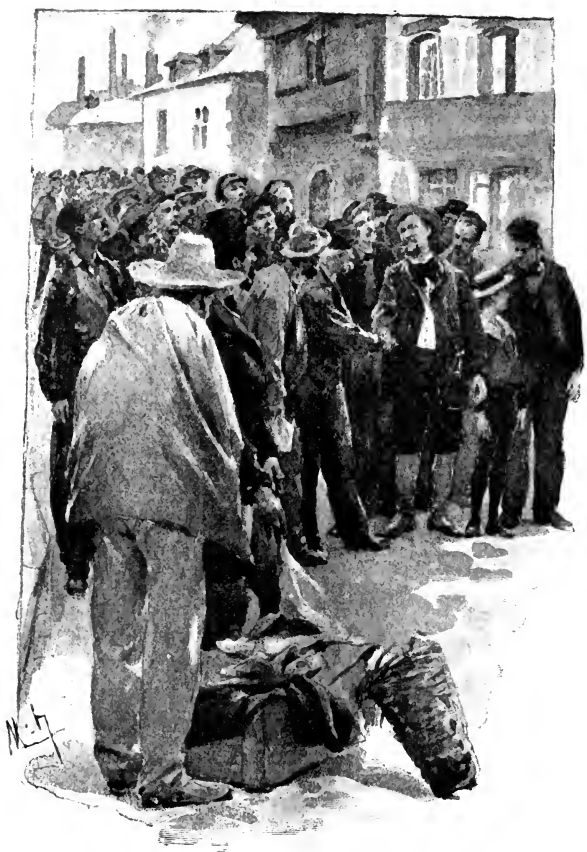


PART THE SECOND.



I.

INDRET



"As he passed through the crowd Labassindre was soon recognized."



THE singer rose and stood upright in the boat, in which he and the child were crossing the Loire a little above Paimbœuf, and with a wide sweeping gesture of the arms as if he would have

clasped the river within them, exclaimed :

“Look at that, old boy ; is not that grand ? ”

Notwithstanding the touch of grotesqueness and commonplace in the actor's admiration, it was well justi-

fied by the splendid landscape unrolling before their eyes.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. A July sun, a sun of melting silver, spread a long luminous pathway of rays upon the waters. In the air was a tremulous reverberation, a mist of light, through which appeared the gleaming life of the river, active and silent, flashing upon the sight with the rapidity of a mirage. Dimly seen sails high in the air, which in this dazzling hour seem pale as flax, pass in the distance as if in flight. They were great barges coming from Noirmoutiers, laden to the very edge with white salt sparkling all over with shining spangles, and worked by picturesque crews ; men with the great three-cornered hat of the Breton salt worker, and women whose great cushioned caps with butterfly wings were as white and glittering as the salt. Then there were coasting vessels like floating drays, their decks piled with sacks of flour and casks ; tugs dragging interminable lines of barges, or perhaps some three-master of Nantes arriving from the other side of the world, returning to the native land after two years' absence, and moving up the river with a slow, almost solemn motion, as if bearing within it a silent contemplation of the old country, and the mysterious poetry belonging to all things that come from afar. Notwithstanding the July heat, a strong breeze blew freshly over the lovely scene, for the wind came up from the coast with the cheerful freshness of the open sea, and let it be guessed that a little further away, beyond those hurrying waves already abandoned by the calm tranquillity of still waters, lay the deep green of the limitless ocean, with its billows, its fogs and its tempests.

"And Indret ? where is it ?" asked Jack.

"There, that island in front of us."

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In the silvery mist which enveloped the island, Jack saw confusedly lines of great poplars and tall chimneys, whence issued a thick filthy smoke, spreading over all, blackening even the sky above it. At the same time, he heard a clamorous and resounding din, hammers falling on wrought and sheet iron, dull sounds, ringing sounds, variously re-echoed by the sonority of the water; and over everything, a continuous and perpetual droning, as if the island had been a great steamer, stopped, and murmuring, moving its paddles while at anchor, and its machinery while yet motionless.

As the boat approached the shore, slowly and yet more slowly, for the tide ran strongly and was hard to fight against, the child began to distinguish long buildings with low roofs, blackened walls extending on all sides with uniform dreariness; then, on the banks of the river as far as the eye could reach, long lines of enormous boilers painted with red lead, the startling colour giving a wildly fantastic effect. Government transports, steam launches, ranged alongside the quay, lay waiting till these boilers should be put on board, by means of a great crane near at hand, which viewed from a distance looked like a gigantic gibbet.

At the foot of this gallows stood a man watching the approach of the boat.

"It is Roudic," said the singer, and from the deepest depths he brought forth a formidable "hurrah!" which made itself heard even in the midst of all the din of forging and hammering.

"Is that you, young 'un?"

"Yes, by Jove, it is I; are there two such notes as mine in the whole world?"

The boat touched the shore, and the two brothers sprang into each other's arms, with a mighty greeting.

They were alike; but Roudic was much older, and wanting in that embonpoint so quickly acquired by singers in the exercise of trills and sustained notes. Instead of the pointed beard of his brother, he was shaven, sunburnt, and his sailor's cap, a blue wool knitted cap, shaded a true Breton face, tanned by the sea, cut in granite, with small eyes, and a keen glance sharpened by the minute work of a fitter and adjuster.

"And how are all at home?" asked Labassindre. "Clarisse, Zénaïde, every one?"

"Everyone is quite well, thank Heaven. Ah, ah! this is our new apprentice. He looks like a nice little chap; only he doesn't look over strong."

"Strong as a horse, my dear fellow, and warranted by the Paris doctors."

"So much the better, then, for ours is a roughish trade. And now, if you are ready, let us go and see the manager."

They followed a long alley of fine trees that soon changed into a street, such as is found in small towns, bordered by white houses, clean and all alike. Here lived a certain number of the factory workmen, the foremen, and first hands. The others were located on the opposite bank, at Montagne or at Basse Indre.

At this hour all was silent, life and movement being concentrated within the iron-works; and had it not been for the linen drying at the windows, the flower-pots ranged near the panes, the occasional cry of a child, or the rhythmical rocking of a cradle heard through some half-opened door, the place might have been deemed uninhabited.

"Oh! the flag's down," said the singer, as they reached the gate leading to the workshops. "What frights that confounded flag has given me before now."


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And he explained to his "old Jack," that five minutes after the arrival of the workmen for the opening hour, the flag over the gate was lowered, and thus it was announced that the doors were closed. So much the worse for those who were late ; they were marked down as absent, and at the third offence dismissed.

While he was giving these explanations, his brother conferred with the gate-keeper, and they were admitted within the doors of the establishment. The row was frightful ; whistlings, groanings, grindings, varying but never diminishing, were re-echoed from many vast triangular roofed sheds, standing at intervals on a sloping ground intersected by numerous railways.

An iron city.

Their footsteps rang upon plates of metal incrusting the earth. They picked their way amid heaps of bar iron, pig iron, ingots of copper ; between rows of worn out guns brought hither to be melted down, rusty outside, all black within and almost smoking still, venerable masters of fire about to perish by fire.

Roudic, as they passed along, pointed out the various quarters of the establishment : "This is the setting-up room, these the workshops of the great lathe and little lathe, the brazery, the forges, the foundry." He had to shout, so deafening was the noise.

Jack half dazed, looked with surprise through the workshop doors, nearly all open on account of the heat, at a swarming of upraised arms, of blackened faces, of machinery in motion in a cave-like darkness, dull and deep, lit up by brief flashes of red light.

Out poured the hot air, with mingled odours of coal, burned clay, molten iron and the impalpable black dust, sharp and burning, which in the sunlight had a metallic sparkle, the glitter of coal that may become diamond.

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But what gave a special character to these formidable works, was the perpetual commotion of both earth and air, a continual trepidation, something like the striving of a huge beast imprisoned beneath the foundry, whose groans and burning breath burst hissing out through the yawning chimneys. Jack fearful of appearing too much of a novice, dared not ask what it was made this noise, which even at a distance had so impressed him.

Suddenly they found themselves before an ancient château of the time of the League, dismal and flanked with great towers, the bricks of which, blackened by the foundry smoke, had lost their pristine brilliancy.

“Here we are at the office,” said Roudic.

And turning to his brother, he asked :

“Will you come in ?”

“I should think so indeed. I shan’t be sorry to see the ‘old monkey’ again, and to show him that notwithstanding his predictions, I have managed to become something of a swell after all.”

He strutted along in his velvet coat, proud of his yellow boots and his tourist bag, and shoulder-belt. Roudic did not reply, but seemed embarrassed.

They passed beneath the low postern gate and entered the ancient buildings ; a crowd of small, irregular, badly-lighted rooms, where clerks scribbled away, without raising their heads. In the last room, a man of cold and stern aspect sat writing at a desk, under a lofty window.

“Ah, is that you, Father Roudic ?”

“Yes, sir, I came to show you the new apprentice, and to thank you for——”

“This is the little prodigy then. Good-day my lad. So it seems that we have a real turn for mechanics. That’s well.”

Then, after looking more attentively at the child :

“I say, Roudic, this little fellow does not look very strong. Is he sickly?”

“No, sir. On the contrary, I am assured he is amazingly strong.”

“Amazingly,” echoed Labassindre, coming forward, and beneath the astonished glance of the manager, he thought it needful to recall to him who he was, that he had left the foundry six years before, to go upon the stage at Nantes, and from thence to the Opera in Paris.

“Oh! I remember you perfectly,” said the manager, in a tone of complete indifference; and thereupon he rose, as if to cut short the conversation.

“Carry off your apprentice, father Roudic, and try to make a good workman of him for us. With you, I shall have no trouble.”

The singer vexed at having made no impression, left much discomfited. Roudic remained behind in the office and exchanged a few words in a low tone with his chief. After which the two men and the child went downstairs again, very differently impressed. Jack pondered over the words: “He is not strong enough,” which every one had repeated to him from the moment of his arrival; Labassindre digested as best he could his humiliation, the fitter too seemed pre-occupied.

When they were once more outside:—

“Did he say anything annoying?” inquired Labassindre of his brother. “He looks even more crusty than in my time.”

Roudic shook his head sadly:—

“No, indeed. He was speaking to me of Charlot, our poor sister’s son, who seems likely to give us a deal of trouble.”

“The Nantais give you trouble?” asked the singer. “What’s up, then?”

“Why this: that since his mother’s death, he has become a regular tippler; he gambles, drinks, makes debts. Still he gets good pay in the designers’ shop. There is not such another designer in Indret. But everything is swallowed up by his card playing. One can only suppose that the passion is too strong for him, for every one here has had a hand in trying to reform him; the manager, my wife, myself; nothing does any good. He weeps, he is in despair, promises never to touch a card again; then the instant he gets his pay, crack! off he goes to Nantes and gambles it away. I have paid money for him lots of times. But now I can do no more. I have my house to keep, you see; then there is Zénaïde growing up, we shall have to settle her. Poor girl! When I think that I once had an idea of marrying her to her cousin! She would be a happy woman by this time! However, it was she who would have nothing to say to him, though he is a good looking fellow and as wheedling as they make ’em. Ah! women have more common sense than we have. Well, well. Just now, we are trying to get him sent away, in order to break off with his bad companions. The manager was just telling me that he had found a place for him at Guérigny in the Nièvre country. But I don’t know if the fellow will go there. He must have some tie, that is what keeps him here. I tell you what brother, you should talk to him about it this evening. Perhaps he would listen to you.”

“I’ll see to it, have no fear,” said Labassindre with an air of importance.

As they talked, they passed along the streets of the iron-works laid with rails, crowded at this hour, the working day just at an end, with a concourse of men of all kinds and sizes and trades; a motley of blouses, pilot jackets,

the coats of the designers mixing with the uniforms of the overseers.

The gravity with which this deliverance from toil was effected struck Jack forcibly. He compared this scene with the cries, the jostling on the pavements which in Paris enliven the exit from the workshops, and make it as noisy as that of a school. Here, rule and discipline were sensibly felt, just as on board a man of war.

A warm mist of steam floated over this mass of human beings, a steam that the sea-breeze had not yet dispersed, and which hung like a heavy cloud in the stillness of this July evening. From the now silent workshops evaporated the odours of the forge. Steam whistled forth into the gutters, sweat stood on all the foreheads, and the panting that had puzzled Jack a little while ago had given place to a breath of relief from these two thousand chests wearied with the day's labour.

As he passed through the crowd, Labassindre was soon recognized :

"Hullo! young 'un, how are you?"

He was surrounded, his hand eagerly shaken, and from one to another passed the words :—

"Here, look at Roudic's brother, the fellow who makes four thousand pounds a year just by singing."

Everyone wished to see him, for one of the legends of the workshops was this supposed fortune of the quondam blacksmith, and since his departure more than one young fellow-worker had searched to the very bottom of his larynx, to try if the famous note, the note worth millions, were not by some happy chance to be found there.

In the midst of this cortege of admirers, whom his theatrical costume impressed still more, the singer walked along with his head in the air, talking and laughing, casting "Good morning, Father so and so! Good morn-

ing, Mother what's your name ! " towards the little houses enlivened by women's faces looking out, towards the public-houses and cook-shops which were frequent in this part of Indret ; where also hawkers of all kinds held sway, exposing their merchandise in the open air ; blouses, shoes, hats, kerchiefs, all the ambulating trumpery to be found in the neighbourhood of camps, barracks, and factories.

As they made their way through this display of wares, Jack imagined he saw a familiar face, a smile, parting the various groups to reach him ; but it was only a lightning flash, a mere vision swept away at once by the ever-changing tide of the mass flowing away and dispersing through the great industrial city, and spreading itself over to the other side of the river, in long ferry-boats, active, numerous, heavily-laden, as if it were the passage of an army.

Evening was closing in over the dispersing crowd. The sun went down. The wind freshened, moving the poplars like palms ; and the spectacle was imposing of the toiling island in its turn sinking to repose, restored to nature for the night. As the smoke cleared, masses of verdure became visible between the workshops. The river could be heard lapping the banks ; and the swallows, skimming the water with tiny twitter, fluttered around the great boilers ranged along the quay.

Roudic's house was the first in a long row of new and barrack-like buildings, in a wide street behind the château. A very young woman, standing on the threshold of the door at the top of a few steps, was listening with bent head to a great fellow leaning against the wall, and talking with much animation. Jack at first supposed it was Roudic's daughter, but he heard the old foreman say to the singer :

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“Look! there’s my wife busy giving a lecture to her nephew!”

The child remembered that Labassindre had mentioned on the journey that his brother had married again a few years previously. The woman was young, fairly pretty, tall, and lithe; and her face wore an expression of gentleness and indescribable weakness or abandonment, that bent attitude that may be observed in certain women whose tresses are too abundant. Contrary to the Breton fashion, she was bare-headed; and her skirt of light material, her little black apron, made her look more like the wife of a clerk than that of a peasant or workman.

“Hey? Isn’t she pretty?” said Roudic, who had stopped a few paces off with his brother and nudged him with his elbow, all beaming with pride.

“I compliment you, old man; she has even improved in looks since her marriage.”

The others continued to talk, so much absorbed in their conversation that they neither saw nor heard anything.

Then the singer, taking off his hat with a sweeping gesture, began in the open street, with echoing voice:

*“Hail, dwelling pure and holy.”*

“Aha! here is my uncle!” said he whom they called the Nantais, turning round.

There was a minute of effusive hand-shaking and greeting. The apprentice was introduced and scanned by the Nantais with an air of disdain, while Madame Roudic addressed him kindly:

“I hope you will be happy with us, my child.”

Then they all went in.

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Behind the shallow house, the table was laid in a little dried-up, scorched garden, full of vegetables and flowers that had run to seed. Other gardens, exactly the same, separated from each other only by trellised palings, stretched the whole length of a little arm of the Loire, which looked like the Bièvre in the suburbs of Paris, edged with linen and nets hung up to dry, and with hemp steeping, and laden with the *detritus* of all these workmen's homes.

"And Zénaïde?" asked Labassindre, as they were sitting down to table beneath the shade of the arbour.

"We must eat our soup without waiting for her," said Roudic; "she will be here directly. She is working at the Château to-day. Indeed, she has become a famous dressmaker now."

"She is working at the 'old monkey's'?" cried Labassindre, who still owed a grudge for his reception. "Well, I hope she likes it. Such a proud, arrogant fellow."

And he began to pour out abuse on the manager's head, backed up by the Nantais who had reasons of his own for ill-will against him. The uncle and nephew, moreover, were exactly fitted to agree. Both of them on the boundary which separates the artisan from the artist, having just enough talent to feel isolated among their surroundings, yet too much hampered by early education, habits and tastes, to care to leave them. Two European half-breeds, the most dangerous, the most unhappy race of all, with its envious hatreds, and impotent ambitions.

"You are quite wrong. He is, on the contrary, an excellent man," said old Roudic, in defence of his chief, for whom he had much affection. "A little stiff about discipline; but when you have two thousand workmen

under you, there's no help for it. Without it, nothing could go on. Isn't that so, Clarisse?"

He appealed to his wife at every turn of the conversation, for he had two prodigious talkers pitted against him, and he himself was not very eloquent. But Clarisse occupied herself with her dinner, and there was apparent in her whole attitude the indolence of an absorbed person, whose hands are slow, whose glance is wandering, because the absent will is busy with some internal combat.

Happily help reached Roudic, and very decided help, in the shape of Zénaïde, a fat little roundabout, who had no sooner arrived, red and out of breath, than she threw herself into the thickest of the fray. She was not pretty. Short and heavy, with an ill-balanced figure, she resembled her father. The white coif of Guérande which formed a heavy diadem; the short petticoat, supported all round the waist by a pad; the little shawl worn low on the shoulders, all increased the width of this massive and stumpy figure. Positively she looked like a chest of drawers. But in the thick eyebrows and square-cut chin of the honest girl, one felt there to be as much force, energy and determination, as weakness and dependence were betrayed on the features of her step-mother.

Without pausing for a moment to take off the great pair of scissors hung to her waist like a sword, and with the bib of her apron still larded with rows of pins and threaded needles, which formed like a cuirass over her plucky little heart, she sat down by Jack, and began hostilities at once. The eloquence of either singer or designer had no terrors for her. What she had to say, she said openly and simply in the quiet tone of a good-natured woman; but when she spoke to her cousin

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signs of anger were visible in both her glance and voice.

The Nantais pretended not to notice it, took it all as a joke, and replied with mischievous jests which however did not mollify her.

"And to think I once wished to make a match of them!" said old Roudic, half jesting, half serious, as he listened to their disputing.

"It was not I who cried off," said the Nantais laughing and looking at his cousin.

"No. It was I," said the Bretonne drawing her terrible eyebrows together and without lowering her voice, "and I congratulate myself upon it. When I see how things are going, I can't feel a doubt that at this minute I should be at the bottom of the river, simply from the grief of having you for a husband, my fine cousin."

This was said with such an accent, that for a moment the fine cousin was disconcerted.

Clarisse too was quite upset, and her glance, dewy with unshed tears, sought that of her stepdaughter as if in supplication.

"Listen, Charlot," said Roudic, in order to change the conversation, "I will give you a proof that the manager is a good fellow. He has found you a magnificent situation at the foundry at Guérigny, and told me to speak to you about it."

There was a moment's silence, the Nantais was making no haste to reply. Roudic persisted.

"Observe, my lad, that you will have much better terms there than here, and—that—that—that"—

He looked at his brother, wife and daughter, to find the end of his phrase.

"And that it is better to go of one's own accord, than to be sent away, isn't that so, Uncle!" said the Nantais

brutally. "Well, for my part, I intend to be dismissed if they have had enough of my services, and not to be treated like a *chouffiqueur* got rid of by finding him another place."

"He is right!" said Labassindre thumping the table. A discussion began. Roudic returned often to the charge, but the Nantais held his ground. Zénaïde without speaking never took her eyes off her stepmother, who left the table constantly, although there was no longer anything further to bring to the meal.

"And you, Mamma," said she at last, "is it not your opinion that Charlot ought to go to this place?"

"Yes to be sure, to be sure," replied Madame Roudic quickly. "I think he would do well to accept."

The Nantais rose, agitated and gloomy.

"Very well," he said. "Since every one will be so glad to see me go, I know what I have to do. In a week, I shall be off. Now, don't let us talk of it any more."

Night fell and a light was brought. The neighbouring gardens were lighted too, and on all sides might be heard the laughter, the rattle of plates among the foliage, the open air vulgarity of suburban tea-gardens.

Labassindre, amid the general embarrassment, began to speak, raking up his hackneyed theories about the rights of the workman, the future of the people, the tyranny of capital. He produced a great effect, and comrades who had come to spend the evening with the singer, were in ecstasies at his easy eloquence unhampered by the forgotten patois, and fluent in its very lack of originality.

These poor fellows, in their working clothes, black and tired by their long toil whom Roudic invited to be seated as fast as they appeared, sank into attitudes of stolid

stupor beside the table, poured out great draughts of wine which they drank at a breath, with much puffing and blowing, wiping their lips afterwards on the cuff of a sleeve, glass in one hand, pipe in the other. Even among the "Failures," Jack had never seen such manners and customs; and now and again some rustic phrase shocked him by its frank coarseness. Then they did not talk like the rest of the world, but used among themselves a kind of jargon which seemed to the child ugly and low. A machine was called a "*bécane*," the heads of the workshops "*contre-coups*," bad workmen "*chouffique*." An immense sadness fell upon Jack at this table-full of workmen which was incessantly renewed, without any attention being paid to those who came or those who left.

"This is what I must become," he thought with dismay. In the course of the evening, Roudic made him known to the foreman of the forging shed, Lebescam by name, under whose orders the child was to make his first start. This Lebescam, a hairy Cyclop, bearded to the very eyes, made a wry face at the sight of the future apprentice dressed as a gentleman, and with such delicate wrists, and such white hands. For in truth Jack, with all his thirteen years, retained something girlish in his appearance. His fair hair, though cut short, had still a graceful wave, as if yet arranged by a mother's caressing fingers; and the delicacy and distinction of his whole figure, that aristocracy of nature which so irritated d'Argenton was more startlingly evident in the atmosphere of vulgarity in which he now found himself.

Lebescam opined that, above all, he looked very delicate and puny.

"Oh! its only the fatigue of the journey, and his fine gentleman clothes that make him look so," said honest

Roudic ; and turning to his wife he added : " Clarisse, we must hunt up a smock and a leathern apron for the apprentice. Look here wife, you ought to send him to his room now. The child is dropping to sleep as he stands, and to-morrow he must be up at five o'clock. You hear, my little fellow, I shall call you at five o'clock exactly."

" Yes, Monsieur Roudic."

But before going up to bed, Jack had still to undergo the adieux of Labassindre who insisted upon drinking a glass specially in his honour.

" Your health, old Jack, the workman's health ! I tell you comrades, the day you choose, you may be masters of the world."

" Oh ! masters of the world, that's saying a good deal," observed Roudic smiling. " If only one were sure of having a little house in one's old age, and a few acres of land sheltered from the sea, one wouldn't ask for more."

While the discussion went on, Jack, escorted by the two women, entered the house. It was not large, and was composed of a ground floor divided into two rooms, one of which was called the parlour, and was embellished with an armchair, and a few large shells on the chimney-piece. Above, the divisions were the same. There were no papers on the walls, but a coating of whitewash often renewed ; the beds were vast, with canopies and curtains of old chintz striped with pink and pale blue, and trimmed with ball fringe. In Zénaïde's room, the bed was a kind of cupboard let into the wall, after the old Breton fashion. A wardrobe in carved oak with iron hinges, images of saints hanging everywhere in company with rosaries of all kinds of beads : ivory, American berries or shells, composed the furniture. In a corner a

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screen adorned with huge flowers, hid the ladder leading to the attic for the apprentice, making a movable and tremulous landing.

"That's where I sleep," said Zénaïde. "You, my boy, are just up there, over my head. But don't put yourself out of the way for that, you can walk, you can dance if you have a mind to, I sleep like a top."

They lighted a great lantern for him; then he said good-night and climbed up into his attic, a mere den, on which the sun poured down so fiercely, that even at this hour of the night, the heat was still preserved within the walls, concentrated and stifling. A skylight window, very narrow, opened right on to the roof and admitted little air. True, the dormitory at the gymnase Moronval had prepared "old Jack" for strange domiciles, but at least, there, he had companions with whom to share the misery. Here he had neither Mâdou,—poor Mâdou!—nor anyone else. It was the absolute solitude of the garret, opening only towards the sky, lost in the blue of it, like a little boat on the open sea.

The child looked at the sloping ceiling against which he had already knocked his head, at a common coloured print fixed to the wall with four pins; then at the costume laid out upon his bed, ready for the apprenticeship to begin on the morrow; the wide blue linen trousers, "slops" as they are called, and the smock with its strong stitches on the shoulders made to withstand all strain from the movement of the arms. It lay huddled together on the counterpane in folds expressive of weariness and lassitude, as if some utterly exhausted creature had stretched itself there, just as the tired limbs had chanced to fall.

Jack thought: "That is me. That thing is myself." And while he gazed thus sadly at himself, the confused

noise of after-drink talk rose from the garden mixed with the sounds of an animated discussion going on in the room below, between Zénaïde and her step-mother.

The young girl's voice, low and deep as that of a man, was not distinctly audible. Madame Roudic, on the contrary, had a clear, thin voice, at this moment heightened by tears.

"Well, in Heaven's name, let him go then," said she with more passion than from her ordinary attitude she could have been suspected of possessing.

Then Zénaïde's firm and severe tone seemed to soften, and the two women kissed each other.

Beneath the arbour, Labassindre was singing one of those old sentimental ballads, so much affected by workmen :

" Vers les rives de Fran-ance,
Voguons doucement."*

And all took up the chorus with a drawling accent :

*" Voui, Voui,†
Voguons en chantant.
Pour nous
Les vents sont si doux."*

Jack felt that in this new world, success must be for him eternally wanting. He was frightened, divining between himself and these worthy people, leagues of distance, broken bridges, impassable gulfs. The thought of his mother, alone sustained and comforted him.

His mother !

He thought of her as he gazed at the sky filled with

* Towards the shores of France--Let us gently row.

† Yes, yes,—Rowing let us sing—For us—The winds are soft.

stars, those millions of golden dots upon the blue square of the skylight. He had been there a long time and the house beneath him had sunk to sleep and silence, when near him there arose a long sigh, trembling with tears, which told him that Madame Roudic too, was weeping at her window, and that some other sorrow beside his own kept watch in this lovely night.

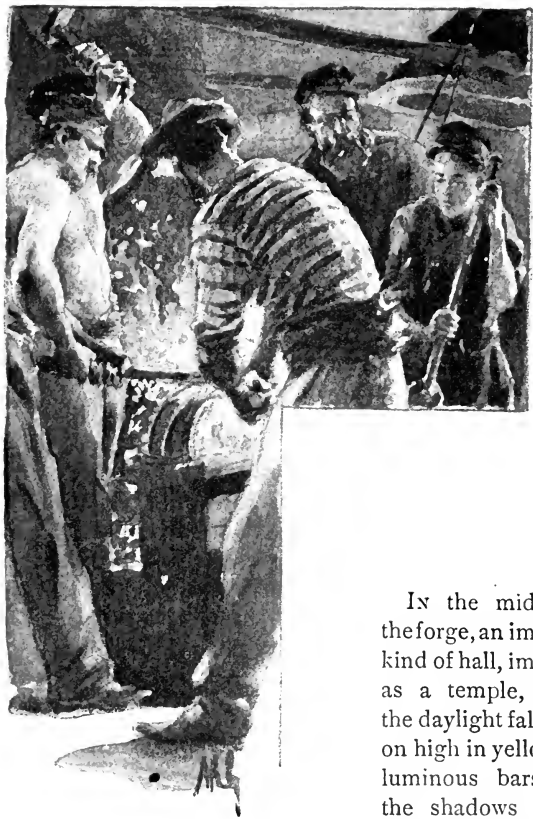


II.

AT THE FORGE.



One Sunday, Jack was reading to his usual audience.



IN the middle of the forge, an immense kind of hall, imposing as a temple, where the daylight falls from on high in yellow and luminous bars, and the shadows of the corners are suddenly lighted up by flashes of lurid light, an

enormous piece of iron fixed to the ground, opens like an ever greedy, ever moving jaw ready to seize and press the red metal that is fashioned by the hammer amid a shower of sparks. It is the Squeezer.

The beginning of an apprentice's education is to be set to work the Squeezer.* There while handling the heavy screw, a business demanding more strength than the arms of a child can possess, he learns to know the tools of the workshop, and gains experience in the handling and finishing of the iron.

Little Jack is at the Squeezer ! I might seek ten years for another expression, without finding one that would better express the impression of terror, suffocation and horrible suffering that all his surroundings caused him.

First there was the noise, the appalling, deafening noise ; three hundred hammers falling at once upon the anvil, the whistling of machine bands, the hauling of pulleys, all the loud buzzing murmur of a crowd in active work ; three hundred human chests, bare and panting, and in their excitement uttering cries that were scarcely human, in a frenzy of strength in which muscles seemed to crack and respiration to cease. Then there were the waggons laden with red-hot metal, traversing the building on rails, the movement of the great bellows at the forges, blowing fire into fire, and feeding the flame with human heat as well. Everything grinding, rumbling, echoing, howling, and roaring. One might well believe oneself to be in the wild temple of some barbarous and cruel deity. On the walls hung rows of tools fashioned like instruments of torture, hooks, tongs, pincers. Heavy chains dangled from the roof. Everything was hard, strong, enormous, and of brute force : at one end of the workshop, lost in deep and almost religious gloom, a gigantic steam hammer of

* At the present time the apprentices at Indret live apart from the workmen. They have their own workshops, tools, and tasks, all proportioned to their capabilities. Indret has become a model school for apprentices.

thirty tons weight, moved slowly between its perpendicular castings amid the respect and admiration of the whole workshop, like the black and shining Baal of this temple of the God of Strength. When the idol speaks, a dull sound arises, which shakes walls, roof, and ground, and sends clouds of dust flying up from the crusher.

Jack felt utterly overcome. He stuck silently to his task among the half-naked, hairy, and perspiring men, who came and went around the furnace, carrying bars of iron with red-hot tips, seeming to acquire in the intense heat in which they moved, the suppleness given by fire at white heat, and the movements of metal softened by flame. Ah! if Charlotte's glance, travelling through space, could fall upon her child, her Jack, in the midst of this human swarm; pallid, emaciated, dripping with sweat, his sleeves turned up from his little thin arms, his blouse and shirt open upon his delicate white chest, his eyes red, and throat inflamed by the fine and cutting dust floating in the atmosphere; what pity and what remorse would have been hers!

As it is customary in the workshop that everyone should have a nick-name, that of "Aztec" has been given to Jack, and the pretty fair-haired child of former days is rapidly gaining a right to the name, becoming the factory child,—that wretched, stifled, overworked little being, whose face ages in proportion as his body wastes away.

"Hi! Aztec, fire up, my boy! Turn the screw. Hard you go. Hard I tell you, d—— your eyes!"

It is the voice of Lebescam, the foreman of the shop, who speaks amid the tempest of this babel of sounds. This black giant, to whom Roudic has confided the beginning of the apprentice's education, interrupts his own work occasionally to give him a bit of advice, or to

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teach him to hold a hammer. The master is brutal, the child awkward. The master despises this weakness, the child is nervous and afraid in the presence of this strength. He does what he is told, and screws the vice the best he can. But his hands are covered with blisters and burns, enough to make him feverish and ready to cry. At times he is no longer conscious of his own existence. It seems as if he too were a part of this complicated plant, that he is but an instrument among these other instruments, something like a little unconscious pulley, that without a will of its own, turns, creaks along with the rest of the gear, directed by the occult invisible force, which he now knows, admires, and fears: steam!

It is by steam that all those leathern bands intermingled in the roof of the building are worked, ascending, descending, crossing one another, connected with pulleys, hammers, and bellows. It is steam that moves the Nasmyth hammer, and those enormous planing machines beneath which the hardest iron is diminished into shavings no thicker than a thread, twisted and curled like locks of hair. It is steam that throws glowing jets of flame into the corners of the forge, that distributes work and strength to all parts of the building. It was the dull sound, the regular throb of this that so impressed the child immediately on arrival; and already it seemed to him that by this alone he lived, that he was swallowed up in this vast breath, which had made of him as docile a thing as the machines that were moved by it.

It was a terrible life, especially after the two years of freedom and of open air which he had spent at Les Aulnettes!

Every morning at five old Roudic would call him:

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"Hi there! little 'un!" His voice resounded all through the plank-built house. A bit of bread was eaten in haste. Standing by the table they would gulp down a glass of wine poured out by pretty Clarisse, still in her night-cap. Then they would start for the works, where a melancholy, indefatigable bell was sounding, prolonging its *ding, ding, ding*, as if it were its business to call up not only the island of Indret, but all the neighbouring shores, the sky, the river, and the port of Paimbœuf and that of Saint-Nazaire as well. Then came a confused scuffling, a rush through the streets and courtyards, and at the doors of the shops. After which, the regulation ten minutes being at an end, the hauled-down flag announced that the works were closed to late comers. At the first offence a fine was levied; at the second, a few days' pay was stopped; at the third, the offender was dismissed.

D'Argenton's rules, stifling and harsh though they might be, were nothing to this.

Jack was terribly afraid of "missing the flag," and generally he was at the door long before the first stroke of the bell. One day, however, two or three months after his first entry into the iron-works, the mischievousness of some of the other apprentices almost prevented him from arriving in time. On that morning, the wind, which blew from the sea with that cheerful boisterousness it acquires in boundless space, swooped down upon Jack's cap just as he was entering the works, and snatched it away.

"Stop it, stop it!" cried the child running after it all the length of the downward-sloping street; but instead of stopping it, an apprentice who was passing by, had already with a kick sent the cap flying still further. Another did the same, then another and another. The game became highly amusing for every one but Jack,

who ran his hardest amid hootings, shouts, and laughter, keeping back the while a desperate longing to cry, for he felt keenly how much hatred lay behind this gross and clumsy merriment. During all this time, the bell was tolling its last strokes. The child was obliged to quit his pursuit, and hastily retrace his steps. He was in despair. A cap costs money. He would have to write to his mother and ask for it; and suppose d'Argenton should see the letter! What, however, most disheartened him was the hatred by which he was surrounded, and which betrayed itself in the smallest things. There are some beings who absolutely need affection to live, just as some plants need heat; Jack was one of these. As he ran, he sadly asked himself, "What have I done to them?" When, panting and out of breath, he reached the still open gate, he suddenly heard a limping step behind him, a snorting sound, and almost directly felt a heavy hand on his shoulder. Turning round he beheld a kind of red-haired monster smiling to him,—a smile composed of a thousand tiny wrinkles,—who brought him back his lost cap which he had picked up. It was the second time since his arrival at Indret that Jack had encountered that kindly smile, that familiar face. Where had he seen them first? Why of course! on the Corbeil road—the pedlar flying from the storm, with a cargo of hats on his shoulders. But at the present moment they had no time to renew their acquaintance. The overlooker called out as he lowered the flag—

"Hi! Aztec! hurry up."

He could only seize his cap and thank Bélisaire who went hobbling down the street.

That day, as he worked the squeezer, Jack felt less sad, less lonely. All the time, as he worked, the charming Corbeil road appeared to him, winding away in the very

midst of the forge, with its skirting of parks and lawns and the Doctor's trap returning homewards in the evening, along the edge of the wood ; the freshness of these dream-land meadows, and glimpses of river, caught here in this hell, gave him sensations of delirium, cold shivers succeeded by feverish heats. When he came out, he sought for Bélisaire all over Indret ; but the hawker was not to be found. Next day, the day after that, still no one. Little by little the ugly vision, which had recalled to him so many beautiful things, faded from his memory, slowly and with difficulty, with the same hobbling gait as that with which in reality it trod the earth. Then he fell back again into his solitude.

In the workshops they did not like him. Every assemblage of men has need of a scape-goat, a being on whom it may vent all the irony, the nervous impatience of fatigue. This was Jack's rôle in the shops. The other apprentices, nearly all born at Indret, sons or brothers of workmen, being better protected were spared ; for these persecutions without redress are reserved for the weak, the inoffensive, and the innocent. For him, no defender was ready. The foreman finding him too puny, had given up troubling himself about him, and had carelessly resigned him to the capricious tyrannies of the whole shop. Besides, what business had this delicate Parisian at Indret? A fellow who said "Yes, Sir," and "Thank you, Sir," to his comrades? His turn for mechanics had been so much vaunted. But the Aztec knew nothing at all about them ! He could not even put in a rivet. Soon, contempt excited in these people a kind of cold cruelty, the revenge of brute force over intelligent weakness. Not a day passed but some cruel and wretched trick was played him. The apprentices in particular, were ferocious. On one occasion, one of them handed him a

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piece of iron, heated at the end to dull red heat. "Take that, Aztec." In consequence of which, he had a week in the infirmary. Then the brutalities and awkwardnesses of these men, who, accustomed as they were to carry heavy weights, were no longer aware of the force of their blows.

The only day on which Jack enjoyed a little rest and amusement was Sunday. On that day, he would fetch out of his box one of Doctor Rivals' books, and would go off to read it on the banks of the Loire. At the furthest point of the island was an old half-ruined tower, called the tower of Saint-Hermeland, which looked as if it had been a watchman's turret in the days of the Norman invasion. It was at the foot of this tower, among the hollows of the rocks, that the apprentice would ensconce himself, his book open upon his knee, and the sound, the sweep, the magic of the river before him. The Sunday bells rang in the air, singing of rest, and the welcome halt from work. Boats passed in the distance, and in various spots, far away from where he sat, children bathed in the water with shouts of laughter.

He read, but often Monsieur Rivals' books were too stiff for him, overstepped the actual measure of his intelligence, leaving behind, so to speak, but a sowing of good grain which could only germinate in time. Then he would pause, and remain there dreaming, his thoughts floating away to the sound of the water lapping against the stones, and the even regularity of the ebbing tide. They travelled far, far away, far from the shops and the workmen, back to his mother and his little friend, to other Sundays far happier and very different from these, to meetings after mass, walks in Etiolles by the side of the dazzling Charlotte, or games of cards in the great surgery which little Cécile's white apron lighted up with so much serenity and childlike freshness.

Thus, for a few hours, he could forget and be happy. But autumn came with heavy rains and rough winds that put a stop to his pilgrimages to the tower of Saint-Hermeland. Henceforward, he spent his Sundays at the Roudics'.

The gentleness of the child had touched these Roudics. They were very good to him. Zénaïde, above all, was devoted to him; looked after his linen with maternal care, with the abrupt briskness which distinguished her, and which it was surprising to find in a creature so thick and heavy in every way. At the Château, when she went to work there for the day, she spoke of nothing but the apprentice. Old Roudic, while entertaining a certain amount of contempt for the weakness and lack of workmanlike aptitude shown by Jack, would say—

“All the same, he is a good little chap.”

He thought, however, that he read too much, and sometimes asked him, laughingly, whether he was studying to become a curé or a schoolmaster. Notwithstanding this, he treated him with some respect, on account of the very instruction he deprecated. The truth is, that beyond fitting, good old Roudic knew nothing in the world, and read and wrote no better than when he left school, and this rather embarrassed him since he had become overseer, and had married the second Madame Roudic.

She was the daughter of an ordnance store-keeper, the genteel young lady to be found in small towns, well brought up in a poor and numerous family, of which each member took a share of economy and work. Reduced to this marriage, disproportionate both as regards age and education, she had had until now a calm and condescending affection for her husband. As

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for him, he was lost in admiration before his wife, and just as much in love as if he were but twenty; and he would willingly have laid himself as a bridge across the gutters, so that she might not wet the sole of her foot. Full of tenderness, he gazed at her and found her prettier and daintier than the wives of the other overseers, nearly all of them stout Bretonnes, far more occupied with their household affairs than with their personal adornment.

Clarisse had, in fact, the manners, look and ways of girls who, though poor, are accustomed by the nature of their work to a relative kind of elegance; and she had at her fingers' ends, idle though they had been since her marriage, such an art of adorning and dressing herself as contrasted with the conventual appearance of the women of the country, who hide their hair under heavy bands of linen, and thicken their waists with the thick, straight folds of their petticoats.

The dwelling itself bore evidence of this refinement. Behind the broad curtains of white muslin that are the pride of all Breton houses, the somewhat scarce furniture shone polished and clean, with a posy of some sort, or a pot of basil, or a red gillyflower on the window-sill. When Roudic returned every evening from work, he felt a fresh delight at finding the house clean, and his wife neat, as if it were Sunday. He did not waste time in wondering why Clarisse was as idle as on the day of rest; why, when the preparations for meals were over, she dreamily leant on her elbow instead of taking up some sewing as a good housewife should do, who finds the day all too short for the duties still to be fulfilled.

Honest Roudic naïvely believed that in thus beautifying herself his wife only thought of him; and he was too popular at Indret for anyone to undeceive him, and

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tell him that another had monopolized the thoughts and affections of the pretty Clarisse.

How much truth was there at the bottom of all this ?

In all the house-door gossipings common to small towns, which wing their flight so far and so fast, never was the name of Madame Roudic mentioned without its being coupled with that of the Nantais.

If what was said were true, it must be urged in excuse for Clarisse, that she and the Nantais had known each other before her marriage. He had been in the habit of seeing her at her father's, when he accompanied Roudic ; and if the nephew, fine, handsome, curly-headed fellow that he was, had wished to marry instead of his uncle, the preference would certainly have been given to him. But the curled darling had no such idea. He did not discover that Clarisse was fascinating, pretty and dainty until she had become his little aunt ; a little aunt with whom he acquired the habit of discussing their singular relationship in a tone of affectionate raillery, he being a little older than she was.

What was the consequence ?

With all the facilities afforded by close neighbourhood, by the intimacy permitted by custom, by those long evening tête-à-tête talks, while old Roudic slept on a corner of the table and Zénaïde was away, delayed at the Château for some unusually urgent work, had these two natures, equally attractive to each other the strength to resist their inclination ? It was hard to believe. They seemed made for one another ; the languid indifference of Clarisse would have leant so naturally for support on the sturdy shoulder of the handsome nephew.

Notwithstanding appearances, no one, however, held an absolute certainty. Moreover, upon the guilty or rather accused couple a pair of terribly alert eyes were

continually fixed; those of Zénaïde, who had from the first watched this gloomy shadow of adultery brooding over the paternal hearth.

She had a way of cutting short their interviews, of coming upon them unexpectedly, of looking them full in the face, that could only be the result of a constant preoccupation. Although tired with her day's work, she would in the evening settle herself down with her knitting between the gaiety of her cousin and the day-dreams of her step-mother, who, with gaze fixed on vacancy, arms hanging idly down in an attitude of utter listlessness, would have passed the night listening to the handsome designer.

Beside the blind and implicit confidence of old Roudic, it was Zénaïde who suspiciously and jealously played the part of the real husband. And just imagine a husband who should have all the forebodings and keen perspicacity of a woman!

Thus the fight between her and the Nantais was a sharp one; and the trifling skirmishing they carried on in public concealed deep resentments, and mysterious antipathies. Old Roudic laughed at it as a remains of unavowed affection and cousinship; but Clarisse often paled as she listened to them, and shuddered through all her weak being, incapable of resistance herself, yet full of despair when brought face to face with her fault.

Just now Zénaïde was triumphant. She had manœuvred so well at the Château, that the manager, unable to persuade the Nantais to go to Guérigny, had just despatched him to Saint-Nazaire to study some machinery on a new model that was being inaugurated on the Transatlantic liners. It would take him some months to prepare the plans and trace the working drawings. Clarisse bore her step-daughter no ill-will for this

departure, though she knew her to be the instigator of it ; she even felt a certain amount of relief. She was one of those whose eyes say "Protect me," even in the midst of their coqueties. And it was easy to see that Zénaïde understood how to defend her.

Jack had seen from the first that the two women had a secret between them. The gaiety of Zénaïde, springing from a valiant and tranquil soul, charmed him, while Madame Roudic's more feminine daintiness appealed delightfully to his habits and instincts of elegance. He imagined a resemblance between her and his mother. Yet Ida was all surface, vivacious and talkative, while this woman was a silent dreamer, one of those women whose reveries wander all the more that their bodies are inactive. Then they had neither the same features, nor the same gait, nor the same coloured hair. Nevertheless they resembled each other ; and it was a resemblance of the most intimate kind, such as results from the same perfume clinging to the attire, the same folds chancing in the arrangements of the dress, from something more subtle yet, that only a skilful chemist of the human soul could have analysed.

With Clarisse and Zénaïde, the apprentice felt more at home than with Roudic, feeling a kind of protection to emanate from them, by reason of the refinement and superiority which, in the working classes, sets the mothers and daughters above the fathers and brothers. He would often read to them on Sundays, now that the weather prevented him from going out.

This took place in the ground-floor parlour, a big room decorated with sea-charts hung on the walls, and a highly coloured view of Naples, with huge shells, with petrified sponges, little dried sea-urchins, in short with all those exotic accessories that the neighbourhood of

the sea, and the arrivals of vessels pour into the modest homes of that district. Crochet anti-macassars on every piece of furniture, a couch and an arm-chair in red Utrecht velvet, completed this comparative luxury. The arm-chair was Roudic's special delight. He installed himself comfortably therein to listen to the reading, while Clarisse remained in her usual place near the window, in an attitude of melancholy expectation ; and Zénaïde, placing the family requirements above all considerations of religious duty, took advantage of its being Sunday and no one being out at work to mend the linen of the whole household, including the blue smocks of the apprentice.

Jack would come down from his garret with one of the Doctor's books and begin to read.

At the very first lines, the eyes of the worthy Roudic would blink, then open unreasonably wide, then, exhausted by the effort, close altogether.

This overpowering inclination to sleep was his despair, it seized upon him at once in the inaction, the comfort of the sitting position to which he was not accustomed, and the softness of the famous arm-chair only added to the longing. He was ashamed on account of his wife, and from time to time troubled by the idea ; and in order to show that he was not sleeping but listening, he would talk aloud as in a dream. He had even adopted a word to express this simulated attention, a scarcely articulate : "Amazing !" that cropped up at the most common-place passages, and only seemed to accentuate more emphatically the absence of his spirit.

It must also be owned that the old volumes with which Monsieur Rivals had stuffed Jack's box were not very amusing nor very comprehensible. There were translations of the classical poets, Letters of Seneca, Plutarch's Lives, a Dante, a Virgil, a Homer, a few books of history, and that



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was all. Often indeed the child understood nothing of what he read, but perseveringly continued, stimulated by the promise he had made, and by the firm persuasion that the books would prevent him from sinking too low, to the level of all that surrounded him. He read on courageously and piously, always hoping to catch some ray of light gleaming between the obscure lines, with the fervour of some good woman who follows mass in its Latin.

The book he preferred to all the rest, that he read oftenest, was Dante's *Inferno*. The description of all those tortures impressed him. In his childish imagination, it was mingled with the spectacle he had every day before his eyes. The half-naked men, the flames, the great gutters of the iron-works where the molten metal rolled along in a lurid stream, seemed to pass before him in the strophes of the poet; and the rushing sigh of the steam, the grinding of the gigantic saws, the dull blows of the steam hammers re-echoing in the glowing halls, gave them, in his mind, a resemblance to the circles of hell.

One Sunday, Jack was reading to his usual audience a passage from his favourite poet. According to custom, old Roudic fell asleep at the very first words, his features retaining that good-natured smile of interest, of which his mouth had so well learnt the shape that it allowed him to say without waking, "Amazing!" The two women, on the contrary, followed the reading with profound attention, but very different impressions.

It was the episode of Francesca di Rimini.

"There is no greater grief than to remember days of joy, when misery is at hand."

While the apprentice read, Clarisse bent her head and shuddered. Zénaïde with frowning eyebrows, sitting square and upright on her chair, plied her needle with furious energy.

The sublime poetry, passing through the silence of this humble workman's home, seemed to soar far above it; far above its impressions, its occupations, its every-day existence, and yet, in this transit, it stirred a world of thought, touched hearts, and like the all-powerful lightning, carried with it a dangerous electricity, strange and capricious.

Tears fell from Madame Roudic's eyes while she listened to this tale of love. Without noticing that her step-mother was crying, Zénaïde, when the tale was over, spoke the first.

"That was a wicked and impudent woman," she indignantly exclaimed, "to dare to relate her crime in that way and to boast of it."

"It is true she was very guilty," returned Clarisse, "but very unhappy as well."

"Unhappy, she! Don't say that, mamma. One would think you pitied her, this Francesca, who loved her husband's brother."

"Yes, my dear, but she loved him before her marriage, and they had forced her to marry a man she did not care for."

"By force or no, from the moment she had married him, she should have been faithful to him. The book says he was old; but that seems to me a reason for respecting him all the more, to prevent others in the neighbourhood from turning him into ridicule. I say the old man did well to kill them both. They only got what they deserved."

She spoke with terrible vehemence; all her filial love, all her woman's honour outraged—and with also the cruel candour of youth judging life by an ideal formed without full knowledge or foresight.

Clarisse made no reply. She had raised the curtain and was looking out. Roudic, half awake, opened one

eye and murmured "Mazing." Jack, his eyes fixed upon the book, dreamed over what he had just been reading, and the stormy discussion it had provoked. And thus, in this humble and ignorant circle, at four hundred years distance of time, the immortal legend of love and adultery, read by a child who barely comprehended it, found an unexpected echo. And therein lies the true grandeur, the true power of the poet, to address the many through the history of one, to follow from the pinnacle of his genius, all those who tread the paths of life ; just as the moon, on clear nights, seems to rise in all quarters of the heavens at once, and accompany with tender pity, and friendly gaze, all the lonely footsteps, all the laggards by the way, patiently and endlessly shedding light upon them all.

"This time I am certain ; it is he !" cried Jack, suddenly, starting from his chair.

In the little artisan street a shadow had passed across the window-panes, with a cry well known to the apprentice :

"Hats ! Hats ! Hats !"

He darted out as quickly as possible, but Clarisse was already before him in the street. She came in as he rushed out, reddening all over, and crumpling a letter in her pocket.

The pedlar was already far off, notwithstanding his terrible limp and the enormous load of caps, sou'-westers, and felt hats, beneath which he hobbled along bent double, for his winter cargo was much heavier than the summer one. He was just about to turn the corner of the quay, when Jack cried—

"Hi, Bélisaire !"

The other turned round, his face lighted up by his genial smile.

"I was sure it must be you. So you are here also, Bélisaire."

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“Why, yes, Monsieur Jack. The father would have it I should stop at Nantes, on account of my sister whose husband is ill. So there I have remained. I make day-trips everywhere—at Châtenay, at Basse-Indre. There are a heap of iron-works there, and business is pretty smart. But it is at Indret that I sell most. And besides, I undertake commissions for Nantes and Saint-Nazaire,” added he, winking in the direction of Roudic’s house, which was only a few yards distant from where they stood talking.

Bélisaire, on the whole, was satisfied. He sent all his money to Paris for his old father and the younger ones. The illness of his brother-in-law cost him dear ; but, by dint of hard work all would come right, and if it were not for his confounded shoes—

“They still hurt you ?” asked Jack.

“Oh, always ! You see, in order to have a comfortable pair, I should have to get them made expressly for me, by measure ; but that is too dear : that’s good for rich folk only.”

After having spoken of himself, Bélisaire hesitated a minute, and then he in turn questioned—

“What has happened to you, Monsieur Jack, that you are now a workman ? It was very pretty, that little house down there.”

The apprentice was at a loss for an answer. He blushed for his smock, clean though it was that morning, and for his blackened hands. Then the hawker, seeing his embarrassment, interrupted himself—

“That was famous ham to be sure. And the beautiful lady who looked so kind, how is she ? She was your mamma, wasn’t she ? You are like her.”

It made Jack so happy to hear his mother spoken of, that he would have remained there till evening, standing and talking in the street ; but Bélisaire had not time to

stay. A very important letter had just been given him to take. Still the same winking towards the same window. He was obliged to be off.

They shook hands; then the hawker moved away, painfully bending, lifting his feet as he walked like a blind horse; and Jack followed him with softened gaze, as if he saw the Corbeil road, with its edging of forest winding away in whiteness under the weary steps of this wandering pedlar.

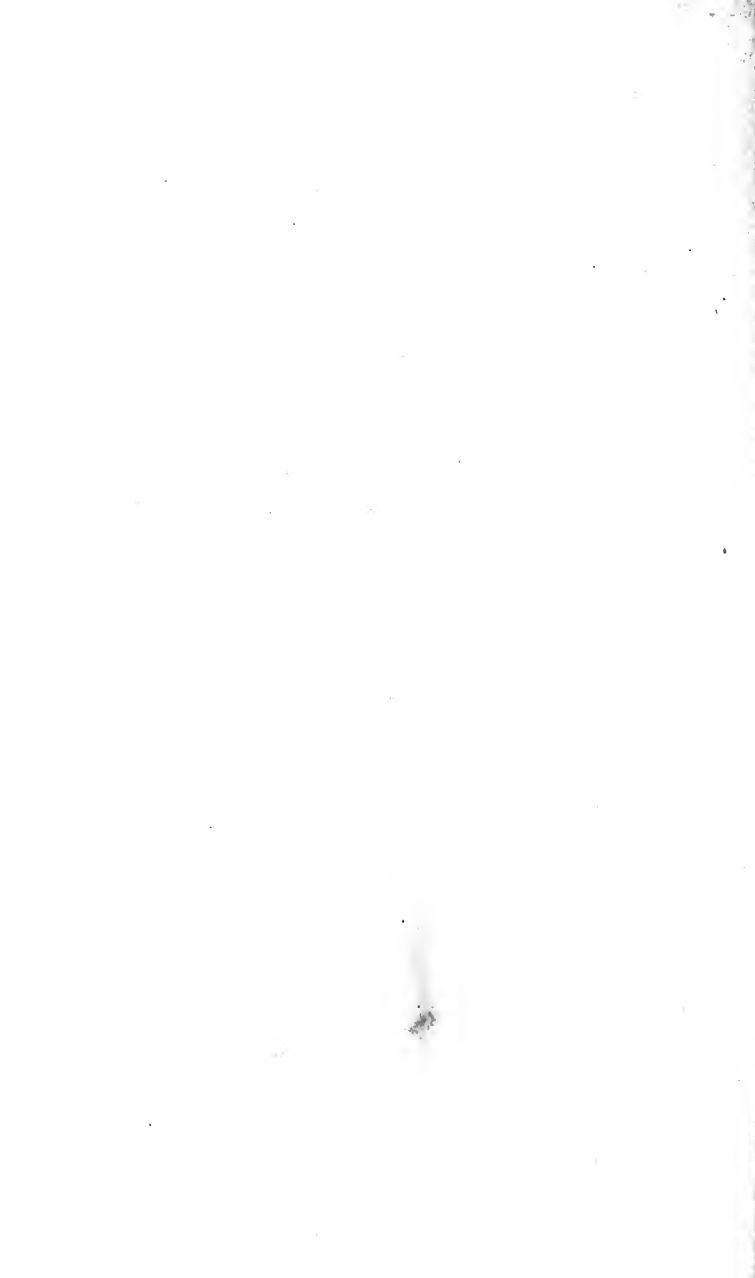
When the apprentice returned, Madame Roudic, deadly pale, was waiting for him behind the door.

"Jack," she said in a low voice, and with trembling lips, "what did that man say to you?"

He replied that they had known one another at Etiolles, and that they had spoken of his people.

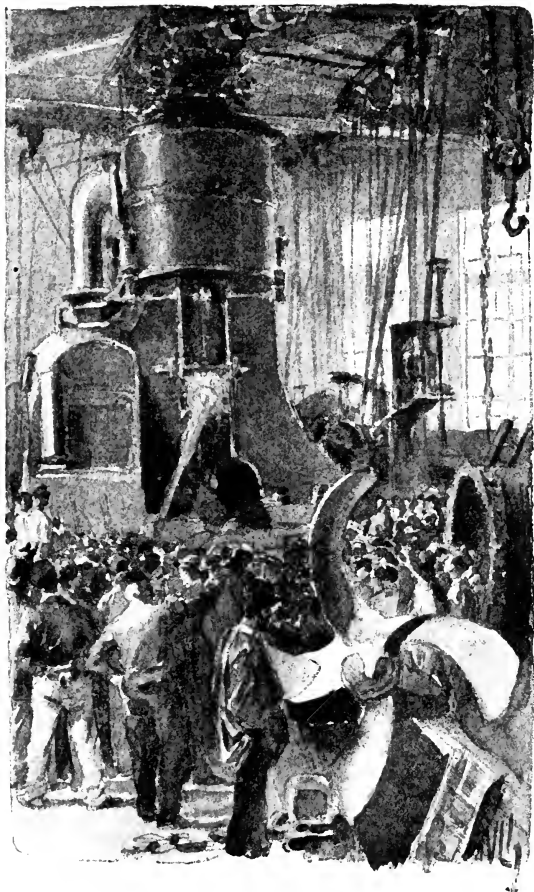
She gave a sigh of relief. But all that evening she was even more dreamy than usual, more drooping and crushed. It seemed as if to the weight of her fair hair were added the weight of some fearful remorse.





III

THE ENGINES.



They had just finished a superb set of engines





"CHATEAU DES AUL-  
NETTES, ETIOLLES.

"I AM not pleased with you, my dear child. Monsieur Roudic has just written a long letter to his brother about you, and while he speaks in the highest terms of your gentleness, docility, and good manners, he declares that in the year you have spent at Indret you have not made the least

progress, and that you decidedly seem to him to have no aptitude for iron-work. You can imagine the pain this causes us. If you do not, with all the excellent dispositions our friends here discovered in you, succeed better, the reason must be that you will not work, and this want of good will surprises and grieves us.

“Our friends are much vexed at what has happened, and every day I have the sorrow of hearing my child spoken of in very painful terms. Monsieur Roudic also says in his letter that the atmosphere of the workshop does not suit you, that you cough a great deal, that you are wretchedly pale and thin, and that really they are ashamed to give you anything to do, for at the slightest exertion the perspiration rolls in large drops from your forehead. Really, I cannot understand this weakness, in a person whom every one agreed in thinking so robust. Certainly, I do not go the length of saying, like the others, that much idleness must underlie all this, or at least the craving for pity so common to all children. For I know my Jack, and I know he is incapable of any trickery. Only I do fancy that he is imprudent, that he goes out in the evening without wrapping up, that he forgets to shut his window, or to put round his neck the muffler that I gave him. You do very wrong, my child. Above all you must take care of your health. Remember that you require all your strength to carry out your plans successfully. Keep your health, and you will work well.

“I admit that the work you have to do is not always agreeable, and that it would be pleasanter to ramble through the forest with the keeper, but you remember what Monsieur d’Argenton said to you: ‘Life is not a romance.’ He knows something about it, poor dear, for life is a hard struggle for him, and his profession is far more terrible than yours.

“If you could only know to what low jealousies, to what mean conspiracies this great poet is a prey. They are afraid of his genius, they would fain prevent him from producing himself. Guess what they did only a short time ago, at the Théâtre Français. They received a play that is absolutely his *Daughter of Faust*, of which you must certainly have heard us speak. Naturally it cannot be his play that they have stolen from him, since it is not yet written, but his idea, his title. Whom should we suspect? He is surrounded by faithful friends, devoted to his future. For a moment we thought of old Mother Archambauld, who is always listening, and prying through the keyholes with her ferret-like eyes. But how could she have managed to bear in mind the plan of the piece, and to relate it to those interested, when she scarcely knows a word of French?

“However that may be, our friend has been much affected by this new disappointment. He has had as many as three nervous attacks in a day. I must say that Monsieur Hirsch has shown throughout the most admirable devotion; and it is fortunate for us that we had him at hand, for Monsieur Rivals is still in the sulks with us. Can you believe that he has not been once to ask for news of our poor invalid? And *apropos* of this, my dear child, I must say one thing to you: we have heard that you keep a close correspondence with the Doctor and little Cécile, and I must warn you that Monsieur d’Argenton does not approve of this. Monsieur Rivals may be an excellent man, but he has a mind governed by routine, altogether behind the times, and he did not hesitate to try, even in our presence, to turn you from what was so evidently your vocation. Moreover, you must try and understand, my dear boy, that in general it is better to hold intercourse only with the people of your own set, your own business,

to remain as much as possible in your own circle. Without this, you run the risk of getting discouraged by giving free play to chimerical aspirations which lead to unsettled existences.

“As to your affection for little Cécile, Monsieur d'Argenton here again thinks, and I agree with him thoroughly, that a childish attachment of this kind should last only for a time ; carried further, it might hamper your after life, weaken your nature, and turn you aside from the true and straight path of duty. It would be wise therefore to break off this intercourse, which can only be hurtful to you, and to which perhaps may be attributed the singular coolness you now show for a career undertaken with so much ardour and good will. You will understand, I hope, my dear child, that I only speak thus in your own interest. Recollect that you will soon be fifteen, that you have in your own hands a good trade which should insure the future ; do not give anyone the right to say that you will never be good for anything.

“Your affectionate mother,

“CHARLOTTE.”

“*Postscript.—Ten o'clock p.m.*—My darling, the gentlemen have just gone upstairs. I seize the moment to add a good night to my letter, just what I should say if you were here, close to me. Don't be discouraged, my Jack, above all don't be obstinate. You know what *he* is like. Very kind but inexorable. He is resolved that you should be an artisan, and become one you must. All you can say would be of no avail. On this point his mind is made up. Is it just? As for me, I no longer know. The end of it is that my brain becomes giddy with all I hear in this place. One thing is certain, however ; you must not get ill. Do, my Jack, take care of yourself.

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Wrap yourself up well when you go out in the evening. It must be very damp in that island. Avoid the fog. And write to me at the Archambaulds if you want anything. Have you any of your chocolate left, to nibble in the morning when you awake? For that and other little things I put away a little sum every month from my pin money. Fancy! you have made me economical. Above all, work. Think that the day may come, perhaps it is not far off, when your mother will have only your arm as a support.

“If you could only know how sad I am sometimes when I think of the future. Life is not very gay here, especially since this last affair. Indeed, I am not happy every day in the week! Only, you know how I am: sorrow never lasts long with me. I cry and I laugh at the same moment, without being able to explain to myself how. Besides, I should be very wrong to complain. He is nervous and excitable, like all artists; but you cannot imagine how much generosity and grandeur lies in the depths of his nature. Farewell, my darling. I close my letter for old Mother Archambauld to post it on her way home. I greatly fear we shall not keep the worthy soul much longer. Monsieur d’Argenton mistrusts her. He believes her to be in the pay of his enemies to steal from him the plots and subjects of his books and plays. It would appear that this has been done before now. Kisses and love to you, my dearly loved Jack. All these little dots are kisses for you.”

Peeping forth from behind the numerous pages of this letter, Jack distinctly recognized two faces; that of d’Argenton, doctoral and dictatorial, and that of his mother—his mother restored to her true self, and who from afar, strained him to her heart and enveloped him

with her indulgent caresses. How oppressed one could feel the poor woman to be, what a stifling of all her expansive nature! The imagination of children readily translates their thoughts into figures, and it seemed to Jack that his Ida—for him she was still and always Ida—shut up in the turret of *Parva domus*, was making signs of distress to him and calling him to her aid as a rescuer.

Ah, yes! he would indeed overcome his repugnance, become a good artisan, and work steadily to gain a good livelihood so as to snatch his mother away from such tyranny. And byway of beginning, he shut up all his books—poets, historians, philosophers—in Monsieur Rivals' box and nailed it down for fear of temptation. He would read no more, open out no more fascinating by-paths to tempt him from the beaten track. He determined to keep all his strength, all his thoughts for the end his mother had pointed out to him.

"You are right, little chap," said Roudic. "Books only make a rigmarole in your head. They distract you from work. In our trade, you don't need so much learning; and since you are of the mind to work, I'll tell you what I propose. Just now I am working after hours, and even on Sundays. Come with me if you like: while we are at work, I can show you how to finish iron. Perhaps I shall be more patient and get on better with you than Lebescam."

From that day forth this was done. Directly after supper, the fitter, charged with some special work, carried the child off with him to the deserted workshop, which, with fires lowered, was still and solemn as though it were gathering force for the labour of the morrow. A little lamp standing on a bench, shed its light only on Roudic's work. All the rest of the shop was plunged into those fantastic shadows by which the moon indicates objects

without giving them precision of form. All along the walls where the tools were hung up, projected sharp and ragged edges of shade. The lathes stood ranged in long rows. The cords, cranks, wheels, stopped and motionless, crossed each other as in a network, while chips and filings of metal gleamed on the ground, and crackled under every footstep where they lay fallen from the benches, silent witnesses of the work completed.

Old Roudic bent over and absorbed in his work handled his minute tools, his eyes fixed continually on the chronometric needle. There was no other sound but the whirr of the lathe gaining motion from the treadles, and the sharp purring of the water falling drop by drop upon the wheel turning at full speed. Standing near the foreman, Jack was occupied in trying to dress a piece of iron, and put his whole strength into the job, striving to take some pleasure in the business. But the turn for it was decidedly wanting.

"It's useless, my poor little chap," said old Roudic; "you were not made to file."

Still the poor little chap did his best, and took not a moment's rest. Sometimes on a Sunday the foreman would take him over the works bit by bit; explaining the working of all the powerful machines, the names of which were as barbarous and as complicated as their appearance:

"Machine to drill stud holes for winches."

"Machine to cut the mortices in the heads of connecting-rods."

Enthusiastically he explained piece by piece all the gear of gigantic saws, screws, wheels, and made the child admire the marvellous fitting of these thousand and one separate parts, forming such a complete whole. Of all these explanations, Jack retained nothing but cruel

surgical sounding names, which made him think of some formidable trepan with an interminable screw grinding its way into his brain. He had never yet been able to overcome the terror imparted to him by all these unconscious forces, brutal and pitiless, to which he had been given over. Moved by steam, they seemed to him so many evil-minded beasts, lying in wait for him as he passed, in order to snap him up, rend and tear him in pieces. Cooled down and motionless, they appeared to him yet more menacing, jaws open, claws extended ; or else, with all their instruments of destruction at rest, they had an air of gorged and satisfied cruelty. Once, however, he was witness at the works, of a touching ceremony, which made him understand better than old father Roudic's explanations, that there really was some beauty and grandeur in these things.

They had just finished a superb set of engines of one thousand horse-power, for a government gun-boat. They had been for some time in the fitting shop, in which, surrounded by a bevy of workmen, they completely filled the vacant space, standing erect, complete, but not quite finished off. Often as he passed by, Jack gazed at them, from afar only, through the windows, for no one but the fitters had the right to enter. As soon as they were finished, the engines were to be sent off to Saint-Nazaire, and what constituted the beauty and the rarity of this departure was the fact that notwithstanding their enormous weight, and the complication of the workmanship, the engineers of Indret had resolved to embark them all set up ; this daring scheme being made possible by the formidable embarkation cranes which were at the disposal of the Indret iron-works. Every day it was said: "They will be ready to-morrow," but each time at the last moment there was some detail to be seen to, some little


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thing to make good, or to perfect. At last, all was ready, and the order was given to put on board.

It was a day of rejoicing for Indret. At one o'clock all the shops were closed; houses and streets alike deserted. Men, women, and children, every living creature in the island would fain see the machinery leave the fitting shop, descend to the Loire and be shipped on board the lighter that was to carry it away. Long before the great doors were open, a crowd had collected in the neighbourhood of the shed, with a buzz of impatient expectation, a jovial holiday-like uproar. At length the two folding doors of the shed were thrown apart, and from the shadow of the background, the enormous mass could be seen advancing slowly, heavily, on the movable platform, which would presently serve as the fulcrum for taking off and which was now drawn along the rails by steam tackle.

When the machinery appeared in the full light of day, a gleaming, solid and imposing mass, it was greeted with a burst of applause.

For a moment it stopped, as if to take breath, and allow itself to be admired in the sunshine that added to its splendour. Among the two thousand workmen of the iron-works, there was not one perhaps who had not helped in this splendid piece of work according to the extent of his talent or his strength. But they had worked in isolation, each man by himself, almost gropingly, as the soldier fights in the battle, lost in the crowd and noise, firing straight before him without being able to judge of the effect or the usefulness of his aim, shrouded in a blinding red smoke that prevents him from seeing anything but the corner in which he chances to find himself.

Now they behold their handiwork, standing before

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them in its entirety, fitted together; and proud are they! In a moment the machinery was surrounded, saluted by cries of triumph and joyous acclamation. They admired it as connoisseurs, stroked it with their horny hands, talked to it in their rough tongue: "How goes it, old girl?" With pride the founders showed the enormous screws of gun-metal: "It is we who cast them," they said. The smiths replied: "It was we who worked the iron, and mingled with it the sweat of our brow." And the braziers, and riveters, not without reason, sang the praises of the enormous boilers coated with red lead like a fighting elephant. If these vaunted the metal-work, the engineers and designers were equally proud of the form. Even our little friend Jack said, as he looked at his hands, "Ah, you rascal! many a blister have you cost me."

To make a way through this crowd of fanatics, enthusiastic as a Hindoo population at the feast of Jugger-naut, which the brutal idol could have crushed as it passed along, it was almost necessary to employ force. The overseers bustled about on all sides, distributing freely shoves and pushes to clear the road; at last there only remained around the machinery three hundred workmen chosen from all the various shops for their strength, who, armed with hand-spikes, or hanging on to enormous chains, waited but a signal to set the monster in motion.

"Ready boys? Heave oh!"

Then the quick notes of a shrill fife were heard and the vast mass began to move upon the rails, the copper, bronze, steel of it gleaming in the sun, and the gearing of connecting rods, beams, pistons, shaken by metallic shocks. Like some completed monument which the workmen are leaving, it was crowned on high with a huge bunch of foliage, waving about all this toil of men's hands as an added grace, a smile from Nature herself;

and while at its base the enormous mass of metal moved slowly and laboriously, above, the green plumes fluttered, now high, now low, and rustled softly in the pure air. On each side the crowd moved as an escort, manager, overseers, apprentices, workmen, all marched pell-mell, eyes fixed upon the machinery; the indefatigable fife guiding them towards the river, where a steam lighter lies, level with the quay, puffing out smoke and ready to start.

Now the engines are beneath the crane, the enormous steam crane of the works of Indret, the most powerful lever in the world. Two men have mounted on to the train, which is to be raised with the machinery by means of iron cables joined together above the green by a monstrous ring forged in one piece. The steam whistles, the fife redoubles its shrill little notes, hurried, joyous and encouraging, the jib of the crane lowers like the neck of a great bird, seizes the machinery in its down-bent beak, and lifts it gradually with a slow jolting motion. Now it overhangs and commands the crowd, the iron-works, Indret itself. Everyone can see and admire it to his heart's content. In the golden sunshine where it hovers, it seems to bid farewell to the numerous worksheds to which it owes life, movement, speech even, and which it will never see again. On their part, the brotherhood of workers feel, as they contemplate it, the satisfaction attendant on a completed work, that divine and singular emotion which in a moment repays for the efforts of a whole year, and sets above the weariness of the toil, the pride of difficulties overcome.

"Hah! that is something like a piece of work!" muttered old Roudic gravely, his bare arms still trembling from the effort of hauling, and dashing from his eyes the tears of admiration that blinded him. The fife had not ceased its exciting music.

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But the crane began to turn, and bend towards the water side, to deposit the machinery on the waiting tender.

Suddenly a dull crack was heard, followed by a heart-rending, terrible cry, which found an echo in every breast. By the emotion which filled the air all at once, the presence of death could be recognized ; unforeseen, sudden death, tearing a way for itself among the living with strong and violent hands. For a minute there was an indescribable tumult and terror. What could have happened ? Between one of the supporting chains suddenly drawn tense by the descent, and the hard metal of the machinery, one of the workmen on the platform had been caught. " Quick, lads, quick, reverse the engine." But in vain do they hasten and make every effort to snatch the unfortunate wretch from the horrible brute ; all is over. Every head is raised, every arm outstretched in one supreme malediction ; and the women, screaming, cover their eyes with their shawls, or the wide strings of their caps, that they may not see the shapeless remains lying huddled on a stretcher. The man has been crushed ; cut in two. The blood, violently gushing out, has spouted upon the steel, the copper, even to the bunch of greenery. No more fife-playing, no more hurrahs. It is in the midst of a profound and foreboding silence that the last movements of the machinery take place, while a group moves away in the direction of the village, bearers, women, a heart-broken company.

Now fear is in all eyes. The master-piece has become formidable. It has received a baptism of blood, and turned its strength against those who endowed it. Thus, there is a sigh of relief when the monster is lowered on to the lighter, which sinks under its weight, and sends out two or three great waves that reach even the banks. The

whole surface of the water seems to tremble and to say : "How heavy it is." Heavy indeed ! And the men look at each other with a shudder.

At last it is on board, with its propeller shaft, and the boilers beside it. The blood that had stained it being hastily wiped off, the machinery has resumed its former splendour, but not its lifeless impassibility. There is a feeling that it is alive and armed. Proudly erect on the deck of the vessel which carries it away, of which it almost seems to be the moving power, it hurries towards the sea, as if it were in haste to devour coal, and space, and to roll forth smoke from the spot, where at this moment shakes the bunch of foliage. It is so splendid an object, that the workmen of Indret forget its crime and salute its departure with one last, overpowering cheer, following it with loving eyes.

Well, speed on your way, great engines, across the world ; make head against wind, tide, and storm. Men have made you strong enough to fear no opposition. But as you are strong be merciful. Control the terrible power you have already made trial of at starting. Direct the vessel without rage, and, above all, if you wish to do honour to the iron-works of Indret, respect human life !

That evening, there was from one end to the other of the island a running fire of mirth and merry-making. Although the accident of the morning had somewhat calmed enthusiasm, each household must join in the festivities already planned. It was no longer the island of labour, breathless and panting, and in the evening so quickly sinking to sleep. Everywhere, even in the gloomy Château, might be heard singing and the click of glasses from behind the lighted windows of which the glow, reflected to a distance, mingled in the waters of the Loire with the glimmer of the stars. At the Roudics', the

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numerous circle of friends, the cream of the shops, were assembled together at a long table. The accident was talked of at first,—the children not old enough to work, and a pension promised to the widow by the manager. Then all thoughts were once more centred in the machinery. The one idea that had occupied them through so many long months was only a recollection now. They recalled the various episodes, the difficulties of the work. It was worth something to hear the shaggy giant, Lebescam, describe the toughness of the metal, and the trouble they had had to make it malleable in forging :

“I saw that the welding wasn’t going right. Have a care! says I to the fellows. With a will; and smite straight. At it then, my lads, after me and look sharp!”

He fancied himself there still. His closed fists fell upon the table and made it tremble. His eye flashed as if the flames of the forge were reflected in them. And the others nodded their heads with an air of approbation. Jack, too, listened with interest for the first time. He was like a conscript among veterans; and you can imagine that these recollections of severe toil necessarily dried all throats most terribly, and that the conversation could not be carried on without many a bumper, and glasses all round. Finally they began to sing; for that is the inevitable finish when there are enough present to form a chorus to: “*Vers les rives de France.*” And Jack mingling his voice to this concert of false notes, repeated with the others :

“*Voui, voui,
Voguons en chantant.*”

If the good people at Les Aulnettes could have seen him, surely they would have been satisfied with him. Bronzed by the open air and the heat of the smithy, the

blisters on his hands hardened into horny lumps, drawling his voice through the vulgar chorus, he was truly and indeed a denizen of that little world. He was a real workman. And Lebescam remarked to old Roudic: "Ah, that's better. That apprentice of yours has lost his airified manners. He's beginning to get into the swing."

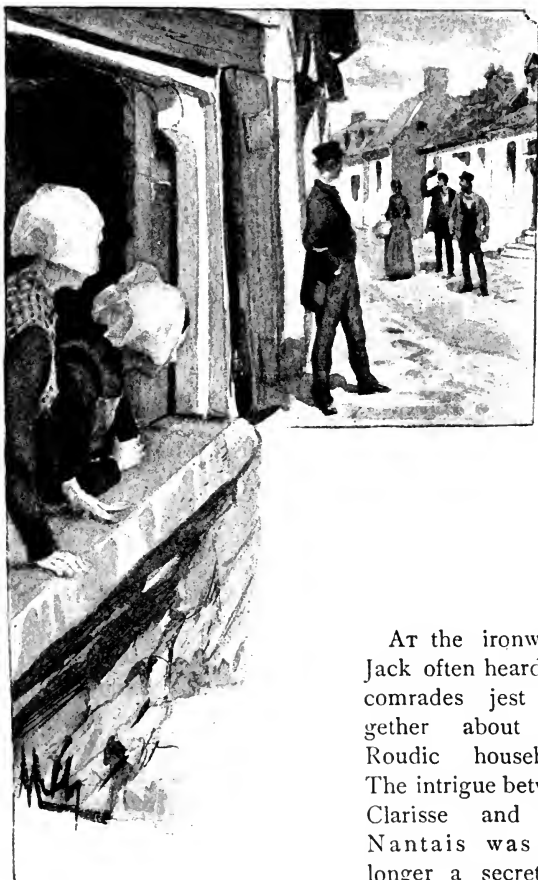


IV.

ZÉNAÏDE'S DOWRY.



The man is on his knees.



At the ironworks Jack often heard his comrades jest together about the Roudic household. The intrigue between Clarisse and the Nantais was no longer a secret for anyone ; and, in trying to part them, the manager had unwittingly made the scandal more flagrant, the woman's fall more irreparable. As long as her nephew remained at Indret, Clarisse was

protected against herself by the honesty of her surroundings and respect for her husband's roof, where their relationship seemed more apparent, and lent a yet more vile and odious aspect to the fault; and she had been able to resist the love-pleadings of the handsome designer. But now that he lived at Saint-Nazaire, where the manager purposely prolonged his stay from month to month, matters had greatly changed. They had corresponded, and then met.

It is only a two hours' journey from Saint-Nazaire to Basse-Indre, and between Basse-Indre and Indret there is only a branch of the Loire to cross. It was at Basse-Indre that they met. The Nantais, who in the "Liner" service was not bound down by the inflexible rules of the iron-works, could take a holiday when he pleased; and Clarisse, on her side, when she wished to cross the stream, had always the excuse of buying some provisions which were not to be found in the island. They had hired a room in a roadside inn, a little way out in the country. At Indret everyone knew of their intrigue; it was openly spoken of; and when Clarisse wended her way along the main street to the quay during working hours, amidst the busy clang of the iron-works, the lowered flag of which protected her from her husband's supervision, she noticed the smiles of the men as they met her, whether workmen or overseers, and the bolder familiarity of their manner of greeting her. On the threshold of open doors, behind curtains drawn back for some household work of mending or sewing, she divined hostile faces and spying eyes. As she passed along, she heard whispered at the doors: "There she goes—there she goes."

Yes! It was too strong for her, and she went. She went, escorted by the scorn of all, dying of shame and

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fear, eyes cast down, perspiration on her brow, blushes on her cheeks which not all the fresh breezes from the Loire could drive away. But she went. These indolent natures are often terrible.

Jack knew all this. The time was gone by when he and little Mâdou puzzled their brains as to what a *cocotte* might be. The workshop soon opens children's eyes, even depraves them; and the workmen did not restrain themselves in his presence from calling things by their name, distinguishing the brothers Roudic as: "Roudic the singer," and "Roudic the . . . ." And they laughed over it; for among the people this kind of shame causes laughter. The old Gallic blood will have it so.

Jack, however, did not laugh. He pitied the poor husband, so simple, so loving, and so blind. He also pitied the woman who betrayed her weakness and indifference in the very way she twisted the tresses of her hair, and let fall her hands; in the absorbed silence which seemed constantly asking for indulgence. He would have liked to speak to her, to say: "Take care—you are watched." And, as to the curled Nantais, he longed to pin him in a corner, to attain his height in order to shake him, make him feel ashamed of himself, and say: "Be off with you, leave that woman alone."

But what, above all, roused his indignation was to see his friend Bélisaire playing a part in this infamy. The hawker, whose trade compelled him to be always on the tramp, served as a halting messenger between the guilty couple, who were generous as lovers are wont to be. Several times the apprentice had caught him slipping letters under Madame Roudic's apron in exchange for small coin, and he had been so much shocked to see his friend lend a helping hand to so black a treason, that for some time past, he had avoided meeting him, and no

longer stopped to talk with him. In vain did the other grin his best smile, speak of the beautiful lady over there, and of a certain slice of ham; the magic charm operated no longer. "Good day, good day," said Jack, "another time, to-day I am in a hurry." And he passed on, leaving the hawker open-mouthed with surprise.

Bélisaire was far from suspecting the reason of this coolness. So little did he guess it that, one day, being charged with an urgent message for Clarisse, and not having found her at home, he lay in wait for the men leaving work, and handed a letter to the apprentice with an air of deep mystery :

"It is for Madame Roudic, hush! give it to no one else."

On the blue envelope, sealed with a little wax, Jack had recognized the writing of the Nantais. No doubt he was at the inn, waiting for her.

"No, not I!" said the apprentice, waving the letter away. "I won't undertake the commission, and were I in your place, I would rather sell my hats than do such dirty work."

Bélisaire gazed at him in blank surprise.

"Come," said Jack, "you know very well what there is in the letters you carry. You know it as well as I do, as well as everyone else. And do you think it's handsome of you to help to deceive that worthy fellow?"

The grimy face of the hawker became purple.

"Those are unkind words, Master Jack; I have never deceived anyone, and those who know Bélisaire can tell you so. Papers are given me to convey; I convey them; isn't that so? These are my little perquisites, and, with such a lot of us at home, I have not the right to refuse them. Just think! I have the old man who can work no longer, the children to bring up, then my sister's husband who is ill. All that is not clover, eh? And money so

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hard to get. When I think that long as I have drudged I have not yet been able to get myself a pair of shoes made to fit me, to my own measure, and that I still trudge the roads with these, that give me such continual pain! Certainly if I had been willing to deceive I should be richer than I am."

He looked so honest, so convinced as he talked thus, that it was impossible to be vexed with him. Jack tried to make him understand how wrong he was. But in vain. "His little perquisites—the children to feed—the old man who could work no longer." Strong in these arguments, Bélisaire sought no others. Evidently his honesty was not the same as Jack's. He was honest without any gradations, without delicacy, as honesty is understood among the people, where distinction of sentiment and scruples of conscience are only exceptionally met with, like a rare flower among wild plants brought thither by some chance of soil or of wind.

"I am one of the people now," thought Jack all at once, looking at his blouse. Tears came into his eyes at the idea. Then he held out his hand to Bélisaire, and left him without adding another word.

That Roudic knew nothing of what was going on in his house was not astonishing, for his life was spent in the workshop, amid a lot of worthy folk who respected his blind confidence, composed as it was of simplicity and affection. But Zénaïde, Zénaïde, what was she thinking of? Was she not there? Had Argus lost his eyes?

Zénaïde was there, and even more than usual, since for a month past she had not been out to work. Her sharp and kindly eyes were open too; they had even acquired a sparkle and a vivacity that were extraordinary. They said in their happy language, for eyes speak when they are happy :

“Zénaïde is going to be married.”

They did not merely say it; they cried it aloud:

“Zénaïde is going to be married. Zénaïde is engaged!” And a fine bridegroom he was, a brigadier of the custom-house, well fitted in a light green uniform, with a war-like little moustache, and a braided shako stuck well over his ear. In the whole port of Nantes, which is tolerably large and not lacking in custom-house officials, there could not be found two brigadier Mangins. There was but one, and of that one Zénaïde was to become the happy possessor! It had been a dear bargain however; at least, dear to old Roudic. Seven thousand francs (two hundred and eighty pounds), in good crown pieces, and bank notes that the worthy fellow had been putting together, sou by sou, for twenty years. Seven thousand francs. The brigadier would not consent for less. On these conditions he was willing to see in Zénaïde the most regular features, the daintiest figure, and to give her the preference over all the work-girls of Nantes, the handsome salt-workers of Noirmoutiers and Bourg-de-Batz, who, when they carried their salt to the customs, paid him assiduous court. Father Roudic thought these demands a little hard. They would swallow up all his economies. And, if he died, what would become of Clarisse? And supposing he had any more children? His wife, however, showed herself remarkably generous under the circumstances:

“Pooh! What does it matter?” said she, “you are still young, you are good for work for a long time yet. We will economize. Give her her brigadier. You can see she has set her heart upon him.”

In love herself, she understood the passion.

Since the possibility of becoming Madame Mangin had dawned upon her, of walking arm in arm through


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life with the irresistible brigadier, Zénaïde could neither eat nor drink. She who was so full of activity, was plunged in endless reveries and contemplations, and would remain hours at her mirror, gazing at herself, smoothing her locks, and then all at once making a face of comic despair at her own reflection. The poor girl had no illusions about herself.

"I know I am ugly," she said, "and that it is not for my good looks that Monsieur Mangin accepts me. But that's nothing. Let him only take me. I will undertake to make him love me afterwards."

And the good creature had a smile of internal satisfaction, an approving little nod of the head for herself, for she alone knew what stores of affectionate tenderness, patience and abnegation were ready for him who should find a resting place within her heart. The haunting idea of this marriage, the anxiety to know if it could be, the joy of the certainty when once the affair was concluded and the date fixed, had lessened her active watchfulness. Moreover the Nantais no longer inhabited Indret. And then Clarisse on this occasion had been so kind that Zénaïde had somewhat forgotten her suspicions. What would you have? The woman was stronger in her than the daughter. Sometimes while sewing at her trousseau, at her wedding gown which she was making herself, a sudden rush of gratitude would overwhelm her; she would drop thimble and scissors, and dart across the piles of white stuffs to her step-mother.

"Oh! Mamma, mamma."

Then she would hug her, press Clarisse to her heart, at the imminent risk of pricking her, for her dress was stuck fuller than ever with pins and needles, in this terrible strain upon all her talents as a dressmaker. She did not notice the pallor of Clarisse nor her agitation.

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She did not feel the fever that burned in the hands of the young wife as they lay within her own cool and virgin palms. She did not remark her long and frequent absences, she did not hear what was said in the main street of Indret, she saw nothing, heard nothing, but her own happiness, and lived in a state of joyful exultation and delirious impatience.

The banns had already been published once, the wedding fixed for a fortnight hence, and the Roudics' little house was full at all hours of the cheerful hurried bustle that precedes a wedding. There was a continual going and coming, a noise of opening and shutting doors. Zénaïde ran ten times a day up and down the little wooden staircase with bounds equal to those of a youthful hippopotamus. Then there were the gossipings of friends and neighbours, dresses to be tried on, presents arriving. The bride received a great many; for the girl, notwithstanding her clumsy figure and her abrupt manner, had made herself beloved by all. Jack, too, looked forward to giving her a little wedding present. His mother had sent him a hundred francs (four pounds) squeezed out of her meagre allowance and put aside with difficulty, for the poet audited all the accounts.

"This money is yours, my Jack," wrote Charlotte, "I have put it by for you. You must buy a little present for Mademoiselle Roudic, and some clothes for yourself. I wish you to make a good figure at the ceremony, and your wardrobe must be in a pitiable condition, if, as you write me word, you can no longer wear your English suit. Try to look your best, and to amuse yourself. Above all do not mention this money in your letters. Do not speak of it either to the Roudics. They might wish to thank me, and that might cause me much annoyance. He is

at this moment in a state of the most excessive nervous sensibility. He works too much, poor fellow. And then there is so much done to annoy him !

“ They all do their best to prevent his success. It is agreed therefore ; do not say these hundred francs came from me. They can be supposed to be your savings.”

For the last two days Jack had felt quite proud with this money in his pocket. The pieces of gold really gave importance to his step, and filled him with a lively cheerfulness full of *aplomb*. It was a pleasure to him to think he would have new and clean clothes, not his hideous and often-washed slop. For this he must needs go to Nantes, and he awaited the next Sunday with impatience. To go to Nantes ! that was another pleasure ; and what touched him the most was that all these delights he owed to his mother. One point only caused him some embarrassment, the choice of the present for Zénaïde. What should one give to a young girl about to be married ? How best please her, how guess what might yet be wanting among the avalanche of trinkets and ornaments that falls into the wedding coffer of a bride as a definitive adieu to all the puerilities and all the coquetries of her girlhood ? It would be needful to see what she had.

Jack thought of this one evening as he was going into the Roudics' house. It was very dark that evening. Near the house he brushed against someone who was running along skirting the wall.

“ Is that you, Bélisaire ? ”

There was no reply ; but on pushing open the door, the apprentice saw that he was not mistaken, and that Bélisaire had been there. Clarisse was in the passage, chilled by the cold air of the street, her hair blown by the wind, and so preoccupied that, even in Jack's

presence, she continued reading the letter she held by the streak of light issuing from the parlour. This letter evidently contained some very startling intelligence. Then Jack remembered having heard in the course of the day at the workshop, that the Nantais had just lost a large sum at Saint-Nazaire, in gambling with the engineers of an English vessel lately arrived from Calcutta. This time everyone was wondering how he would manage to pay up, and whether this would not finally break him. It was this no doubt that the letter announced; it could easily be seen by Clarisse's emotion.

In the parlour Mangin and Zénaïde were alone. Old Roudic, who had that morning started for Châteaubriant to fetch his daughter's certificate of birth, would not be back till the morrow; but this did not prevent the magnificent brigadier from coming to pay his court and dine at Indret, his presence being authorized by that of Madame Roudic. Besides, the brigadier's manners were of the calmest and sedatest. Nothing dangerous about them, and he well deserved his epithet of "*futur*," * dry and cold as the tense of a verb. At this moment he was stretched out in the foreman's excellent armchair, his feet on the fender; while Zénaïde, crimson, in a tight Sunday gown, and her hair dressed by her step-mother, was laying the table; he was entertaining her with a serious disquisition on the tariff of customs, how much was paid on corn stuffs, how much on indigo, cod's livers, &c., on entering the port of Nantes.

Nothing at all, all this; yet such a mighty conjuror is love, that Zénaïde nearly died of delight at each figure, and would even stop her work, plate in hand, moved to the depths of her soul by these details of bond and of

* "*Futur*," intended.

transit as by the most ravishing music. The entrance of the apprentice disturbed these lovers already immersed in the peaceful quiet of household conversation.

"Good gracious, here is Jack! It must be late then. And the soup not ready yet! To the cellar, Jack, quick. And where has mamma gone to? Mamma."

Clarisse came in, still very pale, but calmed down, having smoothed her hair, and shaken the sleet from her damp garments.

"Poor woman," thought Jack, as he looked at her, while she tried to eat, and talk, and smile. She swallowed large glasses of water, one after the other, as if to drown the terrible emotion that nearly strangled her. Zénaïde noticed nothing. Her own appetite broken by happiness, she never took her eyes off the brigadier's plate, and appeared enchanted to see with what majestic tranquillity he absorbed everything that was placed before him, without for a moment interrupting a dissertation on the comparative tariffs of raw tallow and lard. Mangin was the customhouse in human shape. He was a fine talker, speaking in measured terms, well chosen, methodical and slow; but yet not so slow as his manner of eating, for he cut not so much as a mouthful of bread, without scrutinising it, looking at it all round, pinching it on every side, just as he invariably raised his glass to the lamp light before touching it, and sipped his wine before drinking it, as if he suspected some fraud, and were ready to arrest, even as it touched his lips, a contraband liquid or a prohibited article of food. So it was, that when he was present, the repast seemed endless. On this particular evening Clarisse bore it with impatience. She could not keep her seat, but went constantly to the window, listening to the rattle of the sleet on the panes, and at last returning to the table, she said:

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“What weather you will have Mangin, poor fellow, for your return, I wish you were safe at home now.”

“Oh well! I don’t,” said Zénaïde, with so much candour that they all began to laugh, the girl herself louder than the others. Nevertheless, Clarisse’s observation had its effect; and the brigadier, interrupting a long tirade upon the taxes on consumable commodities, rose to go. But he was not outside the house yet, and each of the preparations for departure gave fat Zénaïde another quarter of an hour of the beloved presence. There was the lantern to light, the pilot coat to fasten. The good creature undertook all these cares; and the matches took no end of time to strike, and the official gloves to button.

At length the “intended” was packed up. With his hood pulled down over his eyes, two or three turns of a comforter twisted round his neck, and firmly tied I can promise you by two vigorous hands, he seemed to have disappeared altogether in a diving dress. Such as he was, Zénaïde still thought him superb, and standing on the door-sill, her heart a little heavy at the separation, she anxiously watched the progress of this lovely Esquimaux silhouette as it ventured down the black darkness of the main street of Indret, escorted by the balancing of a lantern. Her step-mother was obliged to go in search of her.

“Come, Zénaïde, you must really go in.”

And in Clarisse’s voice as she spoke thus, there was an impatient inflection in no way justified by the girl’s loverlike solicitude. Her nervous anguish only augmented from hour to hour, and did not escape Jack’s notice. Still they went on talking as they set the room to rights. From time to time Clarisse looked at the clock, and said: “How late it is.”

“I only hope he will not miss the train,” returned

Zénaïde, who thought only of her intended, and after his departure mentally followed him through every stage of his journey. There he is at the end of the shore. He calls the ferry-man. Gets on board the boat.

"It must be cold on the Loire!" she cried, finishing her dream aloud.

"Yes, indeed, very cold," answered her step-mother shivering; but it was not on the great brigadier's account that she was worrying herself. Ten o'clock struck. She rose quickly with a jerk, as if to dismiss an importunate visitor:

"Suppose we go to bed."

Then seeing the apprentice, according to the usual custom, about to see to the fastenings of the door, she moved quickly to stop him.

"It is done, it is done. I have locked it. Let us go upstairs."

But Zénaïde had by no means finished talking about her Mangin.

"Do you think them becoming, Jack, fair moustaches? How much import duty do olea—oleaginous stuffs pay?"

Jack no longer remembered. She must ask Monsieur Mangin again. The tariff questions are so interesting!

"Are you ever going to bed? Yes or no?" asked Madame Roudic pretending to laugh, but trembling in every nerve. At last, it is over, and all three mount the little staircase.

"Come, goodnight," said the step-mother, entering the room, "I am dying of sleep."

Her eyes gleamed brilliantly nevertheless. Jack's foot was already on the ladder of his garret; but Zénaïde's room that evening was so littered by the wedding presents, that he could not resist a desire to have a sight of them.

It was a fine opportunity to learn what he wished to know.

During the day friends had come. All the treasures had been pulled out, and were still lying about, spread upon the great chest of drawers on which stood the white image of a Virgin in wax with the infant Jesus in her arms. Near her, a dozen little gilt spoons shone in their open case, hard by was a silver coffee-pot, a mass book with clasps, a glove box,—men's size for the gloves, to be sure!—and all around the crumpled papers, the pink and blue ribbons with which had been tied all these surprises from the *château*. Next came the humbler offerings of the workmen's or foremen's wives. The veil and the wreath, in card-board boxes sent from Nantes, and presented jointly by Madame Kerkabélek and Madame Lebelleguic; Madame Lemoallic had given a clock, Madame Lebescam a table-cover; others, crochet work, or knitting, a bead ring, a pious image, a smelling bottle, and finally a "bridal couple from Bourg de Batz" made in shell-work, two stiff little dolls, their dresses made of various tinted shells reproducing the picturesque costume of the country, the gilt stomacher on the thick blue petticoat of the bride and the short jacket and baggy breeches of the bridegroom.

Zénaïde showed these treasures with pride, and wrapped them up again carefully one by one. The apprentice uttered cries of admiration, and was thinking all the time: "What in the world can I give her?"

"And my trousseau, Jack! You haven't seen my trousseau? Wait a moment!"

She took a key from a cup on the chest of drawers, opened a drawer, took from it another key, very antique and finely wrought, which opened the oaken cupboard, an heirloom in the family for the last hundred years. The two doors swung back, and a delightful odour of fresh-washed clothes and orris floated forth; and Jack



could admire great piles of unbleached sheets spun by the first Madame Roudic, and heaps of linen, manipulated in pleatings and gofferings by those deft Bretonne fingers which excel in the fluting of surplice and coif.

"Aren't there a lot?" said Zénaïde triumphantly.

The fact is that never, even at his mother's, whose glass-fronted presses nevertheless were filled to overflowing with embroideries and fine laces, had Jack seen so much linen arranged in such fine order.

"But that is not the best of all, my dear Jack. Look here!" And lifting a heavy pile of petticoats, she showed him a cash box buried among all this whiteness, as if it were the bride herself.

"Do you know what is in that? My dower!"

She said this with pride.

"My dear dower, my pretty little dower, thanks to which I shall have the pleasure in a fortnight of calling myself Madame Mangin. There is hard cash there, and coins of all sorts, white and yellow. Eh? Has not Father Roudic made me rich? All that is for me, for my dear Mangin. Oh! when I think of it, I should like to laugh and cry all at once, and then to dance as well."

In an outburst of comical delight, the heavy girl held out her skirt on each side, and with fingers spread in the air, was beginning a clumsy dance before the much-loved casket, to which she owed her happiness, when a tap at the wall suddenly interrupted her.

"Come now, Zénaïde, let that child go to bed. You know he must be up early."

It was the voice of Clarisse, but an altered and irritated voice. A little ashamed, the future Madame Mangin shut up her wardrobe, goodnights were exchanged in a low voice, Jack mounted his ladder to the

garret, and five minutes afterwards, the little house, smothered in the snow, rocked by the wind, seemed to sleep like its neighbours in the silent calm of the night. But the mask worn by houses is as prone to deceive as that worn by men ; and while this one kept its windows closed like eyelids heavy with sleep, it was sheltering the gloomiest and most heartrending of dramas.

In the parlour downstairs the lamp is extinguished. A man and a woman stand at the further end, which is lighted only by the glowing embers of a great coal fire dying out in the grate.

The capricious flicker of the flame reddens the woman's face with sudden blushes which seem like those of shame. The man is on his knees. Of him, nothing can be seen but a head of curly hair tossed back, and a vigorous and supple figure bent in an attitude of adoration or prayer,

"I implore you!" he says very low, "I implore you, if you love me."

What could he still have to demand of her? What more could she yet give him! Was she not his entirely, at every hour, every place, and in spite of everything? There was only one thing she had until now respected, and that was her husband's house.

Well! the Nantais had only a sign to make, a word to write: "I am coming to-night—leave the door open," in order to decide her to yield to him this last refuge of her honour, to lose the kind of relative tranquillity which the as yet unsullied home seems to communicate even to the guiltiest.

Not only had she left the door open, as he asked, but once the others asleep, she had re-arranged her hair, put on the dress he preferred, and the earrings he had given her; she had striven to make herself unusually beautiful

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for this love meeting. What more could he want? Something very terrible, impossible no doubt, something certainly that she did not possess. How else could she resist the passionate embrace of those two arms wound round her; the eloquent prayer of those eyes lighted by a fever of covetousness, of those lips laid close against her own.

Nevertheless, she did not yield, she, usually so weak and feeble. She suddenly found a force of resistance to oppose to this man's demands, an accent of revolt and indignation with which to reply to him: "Oh no, no. Not that. It is impossible."

"Come, Clarisse, don't I tell you it is only for two days. With these six thousand francs (two hundred and forty pounds) I shall first pay the five thousand I have lost, and then with what remains I'll win a fortune."

As she looked at him, an expression of terror and bewilderment passed over her, then a startled movement of her whole body.

"No, no, not that."

One would have said she was replying far less to him than to herself, to some thought that was a temptation hidden beneath her resistance. Then he redoubled his caresses and supplications; and she tried to get away from him, to escape the kisses, the passionate embrace by which he generally lulled to sleep the scruples and remorse of the weak creature.

"Oh no! I implore you, think no more of it. Let us try some other plan."

"I tell you there is no other."

"Ah, but listen. I have a very rich friend at Châteaubriant, the daughter of the tax-collector. I was at school with her. I will write to her if you wish. I will ask her for those six thousand francs, as if for myself."

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She spoke aloud all her passing thoughts, the first thing that came to her mind, to escape from the persecution of his entreaties. He suspected as much, and shook his head :

“It is impossible,” said he, “I must have the money to-morrow.”

“Well, then, suppose you go and see the manager. He is a very kind man and fond of you. Perhaps—”

“The manager! What next! He would dismiss me from the works. That would be all I should gain. And yet to think how simple it would be. In two days, only two days, I should bring back the money.”

“Oh! you say that—”

“If I say it, it is because I am certain. On what would you have me swear it?”

And seeing that he would not be able to convince her, that she was finally entrenching herself behind that barrier of obstinate silence which serves the weak as a rampart against both themselves and others, he let fall an ugly phrase.

“I was a fool to speak of it to you. I should have done better to have said nothing, to have gone up there to the cupboard and taken what I wanted.”

“But, my poor fellow,” murmured she, trembling, for a fear arose within her that he might do what he had said: “don’t you know that Zénaïde looks at her money every day, and counts and recounts it. Why, this very evening, I heard her showing her casket to the apprentice.”

The Nantais started,

“Ah! really?”

“Yes indeed—the poor girl is so happy. It would be enough to kill her. Besides the key is not in the cupboard.”

Suddenly perceiving that by discussion she was only weakening the force of her refusal, that each of her arguments only furnished a fresh weapon, she became silent. Worst of all was it that, through all, they loved each other, and with intermingled glances, and lip pressed to lip, told it to each other in the intervals of this sad debate. And a horrible duet it was, in which the air and the words were so little in harmony.

"What will become of me?" repeated the wretched fellow, at every moment. If he did not pay this debt of honour, he would be dishonoured, lost, turned out of every place. He cried like a child, rolled his head on Clarisse's knees, called her "his aunt, his dear little aunt." It was no longer the lover who besought her, it was a child, to whom Roudic had been as a father, who had been thoroughly spoiled by the whole household. She cried with him, poor woman, but without yielding. Through her tears, she still continued to say: "No, no, it cannot be," clinging to the same words, as a drowning man clings to a spar he has seized and clenches in his agonised hands. Suddenly he rose:

"You will not? Well, all right. I know what is left to me to do. Good bye, Clarisse! I will not outlive my shame."

He expected a cry, an explosion.

None came.

She walked straight up to him:

"You would die? Well, then, so will I. I have had enough of this life of sin and lies, of hidden love so well hid indeed, that it is not always easy to find again. Come! Let us go!"

He held her back.

"What! you would? What folly! Is it possible?"

He was now beyond all argument and control, in-

furiated at the sudden revolt of this weak will. An intoxication of crime mounted to his brain.

"This is all too absurd!" said he, and darted towards the staircase.

Clarisse was there before him, and planted herself on the first step.

"Where are you going?"

"Let me alone, let me alone. I must—"

He stammered.

She clung to him.

"Don't do that, I entreat you."

But the madness gained upon him, and he no longer listened.

"Take care; if you stir, I cry out. I will call for help."

"Well! call then. Let every one know that your nephew is your lover, and that your lover is a thief."

He said all this in her ear, for they spoke all through this struggle in the very lowest tone, seized in spite of themselves by the respect for silence and sleep imposed by night. In the red light of the fire dying on the hearth, he appeared to her all at once such as he really was—unmasked by one of those violent emotions that betray all the movements of the soul in the convulsions of the features. She saw him, with his great ambitious nose and dilated nostrils, his thin lips, his eyes that blinked from constant gazing at the cards. She thought of all she had sacrificed for this man, and how she had tried to embellish herself for this night's rendezvous, the first night they had spent together.

And for a lover's meeting what a horrible, horrible night it was.

Suddenly, a profound disgust seized upon her, disgust at him, and at herself, weakening all her powers of

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resistance. And while the malefactor climbed the stairs, feeling his way in the old family dwelling, every corner of which was familiar to him, she sank down upon the divan, burying her head in the cushions that she might stifle her sobs and cries, and see and hear no more.



END OF VOL. I







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